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THE MYSTERIES OF HOIA BACIU

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AND GLOW**

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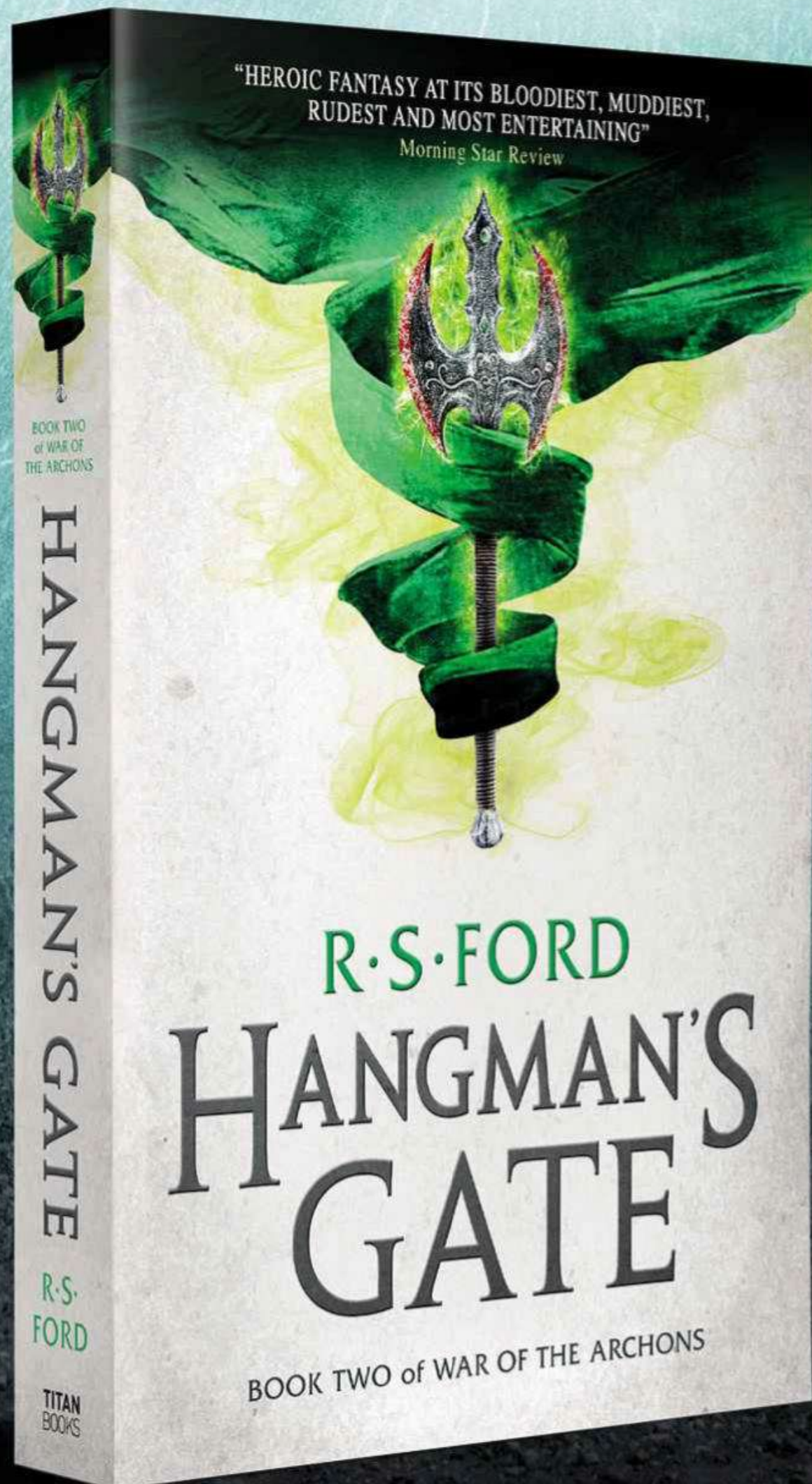
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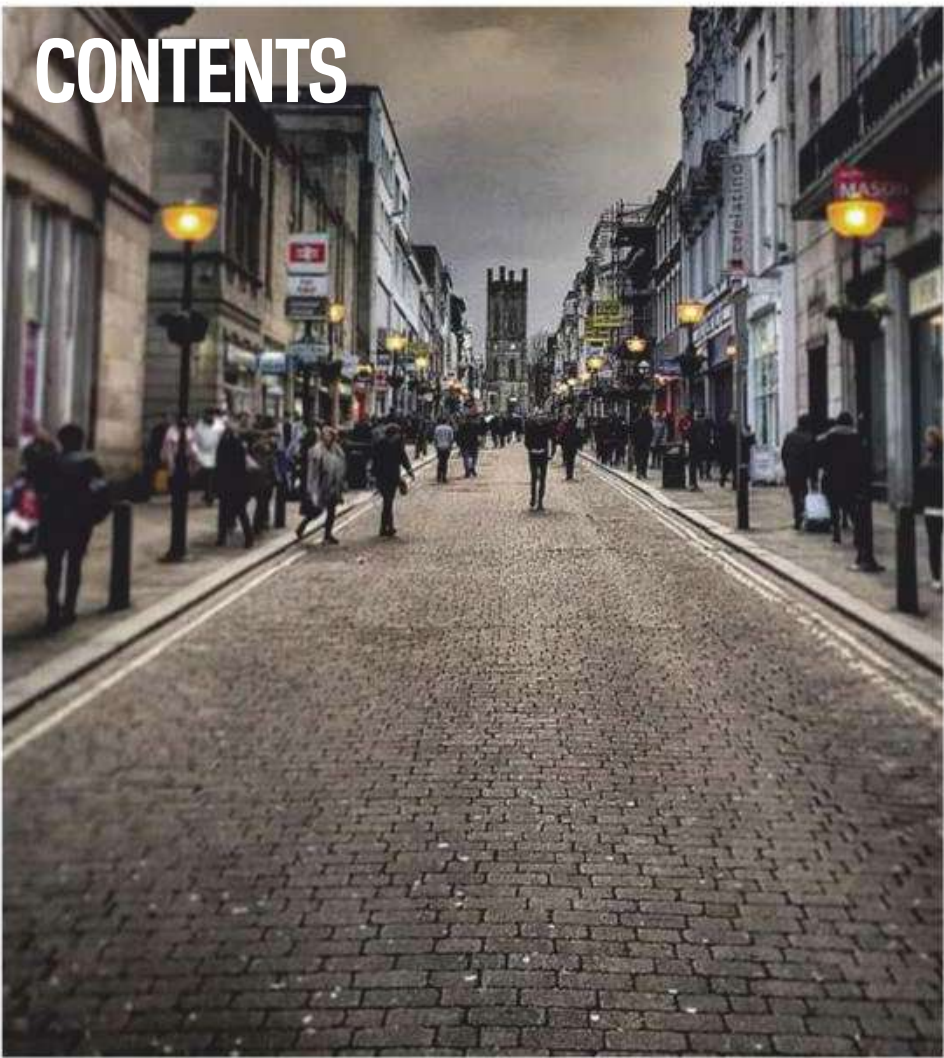
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HOIA BACIU: ROMANIA'S HAUNTED FOREST

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EDITORIAL

CULTURAL EVENTS



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

INVESTING IN STRANGE PHENOMENA

Our cover story this issue concerns a fairly obscure bit of Romanian woodland that has in recent years become something of a holiday hotspot for paranormal thrill-seekers. The forest of Hoia Baci lies just outside the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca but, despite its location, it's famed not for the usual vampire lore but for a more modern mythology taking in UFO sightings, mysterious lights and weird 'time tunnels' into which hapless visitors disappear without warning. Even the trees themselves are distinctly odd, showing strangely distorted growth patterns and ugly cankers on their trunks. Chris Hill ventured into the woods and lived to tell the tale (p32); but did he find any evidence of paranormal activity? He certainly succumbed to Hoia Baci's otherworldly atmosphere, but noted that while "the forest does offer itself up to romantic reverie, as a place offering access to other worlds it requires a very personal investment".

It has, of course, been argued that many anomalous phenomena are the products of just such "investment" on behalf of the experiencer or witness – culturally determined interactions rather than objective 'events'. It's an argument that serves to divide many a field of fortetan study, perhaps never so acrimoniously as in ufology, where the conflict between nuts-and-bolts EThers and psychosocial theorists continues to rumble on. The former camp lost one of its most energetic adherents and proselytisers with the recent death of Stanton Friedman (see obit, pp28 and 30), but cryptozoology is another area in which the debate heats up from time to time. University of Southampton palaeontologist and sometime FT contributor Darren Naish has been getting on the wrong side of Nessie enthusiasts lately, arguing that the smartphone revolution – which has put a high-quality camera into virtually everyone's hands – has sounded the death knell for large cryptids like the Loch Ness Monster. The *Daily Telegraph* (5 June 2019)

quoted Dr Naish as saying that: "You really would think there'd be more and better photos, but the only things that have ever appeared are terribly low resolution little blobs in the distance. I would say that the fact that we haven't got any of the evidence that we should have by now – alarm bells are ringing. It's all speaking towards the fact that this is a cultural event, a belief system." It's not a notion that everyone will

agree with, but you can read more about Darren's take on cryptozoology in this month's 'Building a Fortean Library' (p56).

INFINITY WATCHERS

Last June, it was reported in the press that rapper and Marvel fan Tony Mitchell – known as 'Nem the Infinity Watcher' on Twitter – had been to see the film *Avengers: Infinity War* 43 times; then 44; then 45... "I had already seen the film four times in the first three days, and I just decided to keep watching it," he said. He finally clocked up a record-setting tally of 103 screenings. Nem's crown was taken earlier this year by Steve Ruppel, of Weston, Wisconsin, who managed 116 viewings of *Captain Marvel*. Now, a new contender, Agustin Alanis, of Riverview, Florida, has attended his 145th screening of *Avengers: Endgame*, aiming at 200.

If you were thinking that this sort of craziness was confined to the US, then think again: our very own Leyla Mikkelsen, film reviewer extraordinaire, has won herself a place in FT's strange behaviour files, having accepted a "ludicrous" bet that she wouldn't be able to sit through *Endgame* 100 times in the cinema. As we went to press, she had sailed past her 94th viewing, and by the time you read this will have achieved the century. Pictured above at the start of her experiment in cinematic insanity, Leyla tells us that "whenever I sit back and think about how many times I've watched it and how many hours I've spent doing so, I can assure you I'm questioning my life choices."



DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

HORROR CULTURE





A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

Scientists find new ways to harness natural processes in the fight against environmental disaster

- Regarding the looming plastic catastrophe: in a recent paper, scientists at Kew Gardens announced that fungi could be key to winning the battle against plastic waste, not to mention cleaning up radioactive material and producing biodiesel. For instance in 2017, on a rubbish dump in Islamabad, Pakistan, Chinese scientists found a fungus called *Aspergillus tubingensis*, which produces an enzyme that can break down even super-resilient plastics such as polyester polyurethane, fully digesting it within weeks. The genes that produce this enzyme could be put in marine fungi to help clear plastic in the oceans. Meanwhile, bacteria and even caterpillars are evolving to 'eat' plastic; the waxworm, a type of moth caterpillar, consumes polyethylene, one of the toughest and most commonly used varieties. *D.Telegraph*, 12 Sept; *D.Mail*, 13+20 Sept 2018.

- Professor Tim Bugg at Warwick University has found that a natural glue called lignin, which stiffens plant stems by holding cellulose fibres together, can be turned into a strong, mouldable, biodegradable plastic by genetically tweaking a bacterium called *Rhodococcus jostii*, which lives in the soil and feeds on lignin. Lignin is a by-product of the papermaking process. *D.Telegraph*, 5 July 2018.

- The masked bee (*Hylaeus nubilosus*) produces a nesting material that is non-toxic, waterproof, acid-resistant and flame-resistant. Humble Bee, a biotech company in New



ABOVE: A 68-metre (223ft) long image of a whale formed by plastic waste collected from the ocean during an event to raise awareness about conservation at Rudong Yangkou Harbour, Nantong, in China's eastern Jiangsu province in June 2019.

Zealand, hopes to reverse-engineer the material and mass-produce it as an alternative to plastic. The company initially plans to use the material to make outdoor apparel, which often requires toxic chemicals to keep it waterproof. *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 Aug 2018.

- Droughts could be consigned to history by a water harvester that can pull moisture out of the air using solar power. Harvesters can provide 2.8 litres of drinkable water from the air over a 12-hour period in conditions as dry as the Mojave Desert, where the average humidity is around 20 per cent. The device is an open-air chamber containing a lattice-like structure made from zirconium and adipic acid sandwiched between a solar absorption panel and a condenser plate. The zirconium and acid structure traps the water vapour, then sunlight drives it towards the cooler condensing plate, which returns

the vapour to liquid so it can drip into a collector. Two-thirds of the world's population experience water shortages, yet there is an estimated 13,000 trillion litres in the atmosphere. *D.Telegraph*, 14 April 2017.

- Deep in Oman's al-Hajar mountain range, geologists have found a potential way to remove carbon dioxide from air and water. An exposed section of the Earth's mantle, about 200 miles (320km) long, up to 25 miles (40km) wide and several miles thick, contains peridotite, a rock that reacts with carbon to form marble and limestone. About a billion tons of CO₂ are held inside each mountain, and more is pulled in every second. If this carbon mineralisation could be harnessed, accelerated and applied inexpensively on a huge scale – admittedly some very big ifs – it could help fight climate change. Smaller deposits of peridotite can be found elsewhere, such as northern California, Papua

New Guinea and Albania. And at a geothermal power plant in Iceland an energy company is injecting modest amounts of carbon dioxide into volcanic rock, where it becomes mineralised. *<i>14 April 2017; New York Times, 2 May 2018.*

- MIT researchers have engineered a bionic plant that can detect explosives and send a warning signal. A paper in the journal *Nature Materials* explains how to turn plants into bomb-sniffing machines with the help of tiny cylinders of carbon that can detect nitroaromatics – chemical compounds often used in explosives. As the plant absorbs air and groundwater from the environment, the carbon tubes register any nitroaromatics and emit a fluorescent signal. This gets picked up by an infrared camera and relayed to a small computer or smartphone, which then sends an email to the user. "This is a novel demonstration of how we have overcome the plant/human communication barrier," said paper co-author Michael Strano, a chemical engineer at MIT. Though he and his colleagues worked with spinach plants, "you can apply these techniques with any living plant" to turn them into any kind of sensor, he said. A plant is a better groundwater sensor than pretty much any machine a human can build. The carbon nanosensors can be tailored to detect nitric oxide (a pollutant produced by combustion) as well as hydrogen peroxide, the explosive TNT and sarin gas, used as a chemical weapon. *Toronto Star*, 5 Nov 2016.



STRANGE CONTINENT

Italy's Jesus of Light and other Euro-oddities

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WILDERNESS SURVIVORS

Saved by bears and guided by talking plants

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A NOSE FOR TROUBLE

Pets sniff out their owners' illnesses

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THE CONSPIRASPHERE

As Oregon's Republican senators go on the run and the NXIVM cult's links to the Democrats obsess the Conspirasphere, NOEL ROONEY wonders what's become of Q...

MADNESS IN OREGON

The walk-out by Republican members of the Oregon legislature (to stall the passage of a bill to reduce carbon emissions) started as a local example of the kind of petulance that seems to characterise contemporary US politics. But things began to take a decidedly ominous turn after the state's Governor (a Democrat, Kate Brown) responded by posting on her official website that she had asked the state police to bring the recalcitrant Republicans back to the State Capitol to do their (democratic) duty.

That provoked a response from Republican state senator Brian Boquist which raised the temperature a notch or two. "Send bachelors and come heavily armed," the senator was quoted as saying. "I'm not going to be a political prisoner in the state of Oregon." Ruby Ridge, anyone? Boquist's statement, in turn, provoked messages suggesting local militias were preparing to defend the senators and confront the police. A typical example from the Oregon 3 Percenters: "We have vowed to provide security, transportation and refuge for those senators in need. We will stand together with unwavering resolve, doing whatever it takes to keep these senators safe." Cut through the rhetoric and that sounds a lot like a threat of armed resistance. Another 3 Percenters group in the state added, helpfully: "This is what the start of a civil war looks like." By this point the air was fairly hot, but nothing untoward had happened. Then this notice appeared on Oregon Live: "A spokeswoman for the Senate President confirmed late Friday that 'Oregon State Police has recommended that the Capitol be closed tomorrow due to a possible militia threat'".

Thankfully, there are no reports of armed confrontations actually happening – and it could reasonably be argued that Brown's request for the police to drag the truant senators (some of whom are reportedly hiding out in Idaho) back to the chamber

was as much of an overreaction as Boquist's incendiary defiance – but a number of commentators have pointed out that the Oregon affair amounts to direct intervention by alt-right militias in the legislative process. That in itself is alarming but, more broadly, it suggests that the shift of conspiracist thinking into the mainstream may have the potential to trigger physical consequences.

Meanwhile, a more high-profile affair has got the Conspirasphere's antennae a-quiver. The conviction of Keith Raniere, leader of the NXIVM cult, on charges of, inter alia, child trafficking and racketeering, has inspired quite a few conspiracists to investigate his longstanding connections to the Clintons. It seems that Raniere, and many of the group's members, made contributions to Hillary's election campaign in 2016, while others – including Seagram heiresses the Bronfman sisters – were contributors to Bill's Clinton Global Initiative. Raniere's connections to some close advisers of the Clintons (Richard Mays, Paul Berry, possibly John Podesta) have triggered a chain of logic that leads inexorably to the Pizzagate affair: Raniere was abusing underage girls; some of the NXIVM rituals might be described as Satanic; Clinton acolytes spent time with Raniere; John Podesta once ordered a pizza. You can see how it all hangs together. Raniere's alleged humble beginnings as a pyramid seller in Arkansas only add grist to the dot-connectors' mill.

Finally, has anybody seen Q? At the time of writing, in late June, no posts have appeared from the rabbit hole since 26 May. Some QAnon commentators claim Q is simply on holiday, but it's curious that, at a critical time in the Trump presidency – the re-election bid, the continuing fallout from the Mueller report, the increasing tension in relations with Iran, the new allegations of sexual misconduct – the President's quirky champion should go AWOL. And if Q has simply gone on his/her/their hols, why haven't we all gone with them? #WWG1WGA

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FLORIDA POLICE OFFICER CHARGED WITH FAILING TO HELP MASSACRE PUPILS

D.Telegraph, 5 June 2019.

Man shoots dead brother

News 18 (Indian website), —April 2019.

DEAD BROTHEL OWNER WINS ELECTION FOR LEGISLATIVE SEAT

[AP] ABC News, 7 Nov 2018

Bronze man stolen from Yeats grave tells own story

Irish Times, 22 Dec 2018.

MAN CHARGED WITH DIPPING HIS TESTICLES IN SALSA

Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel, 1 Mar 2019.

Fifth of meat goods revealed alien DNA

D.Telegraph, 6 Sept 2018.

SNORKELLER FINDS SKELETONS' TEA PARTY

<i> 8 May 2015.



TOWER RAVENS BULLETIN | Welcome new arrivals at the Tower of London... and a spooky tale from the Ravenmaster

Following the death in March 2018 of Munin, 23, the oldest and longest-serving raven at the Tower of London [FT367:10-11], breeding pair Huginn and Muninn (both aged 13) arrived at the end of 2018. Now four raven chicks have been born at the Tower for the first time in 30 years. They began hatching on St George's Day. Ravenmaster Yeoman Warder Chris Skaife said he felt "like a proud father". Since the birds began hatching on 23 April, they have quadrupled in size from about 3in (8cm) to more than a foot (30cm) in height, having been fed on a diet of quail, mice and rats. Their iridescent black plumage is starting to come through, although their pink beaks will not turn black for about a year. One of the chicks is set to remain at the Tower and will be called either George or Georgina because of the date the hatching began. The first and last raven to be hatched and live at the Tower was named Ronald Raven following a *Blue Peter* competition in 1989.

Ravens were once common in Britain, but after being decimated by Victorian gamekeepers there are only 7,400 protected breeding pairs left. The Tower usually has seven at any time – currently Erin, Jubilee, Harris, Poppy, Gripp, Rocky and Merlina. All the birds have had their wings clipped to stop them flying off, apart from Poppy, which replaced the old Munin. The new raven chicks will not have their wings clipped, but will be trained not to go AWOL by raven whisperer Mike Keen, who has owned his own raven Grippe, now 14 months old, since she was a chick. She spends most of her time on his shoulders and flies feely around the beer garden at his pub The Boot in Freston, Suffolk. The chance to train the hatchlings came after Ravenmaster Skaife met Grippe and was impressed by her calm nature.

According to a legend allegedly dating back to Charles II in the 17th century, if raven numbers dip below six, both the fortress and the kingdom will



PHOTOS COURTESY HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

ABOVE AND LEFT: Ravenmaster Chris Skaife said he felt "like a proud father" when the birds hatched.



fall. While Ravenmaster Skaife claims that one account describes how ravens were seen gazing on the scene when Queen Anne Boleyn was beheaded in 1536, in sober fact the earliest mention of ravens living at the Tower is in the RSPCA journal *The Animal World* in 1895 and – according to Dr Boria Sax, author of *City of Ravens* – the legend only gained widespread traction during the Blitz. At one point during WWII, only one raven was left at the Tower, prompting Churchill to order that the quota of six birds

be restored. As it's impossible to prove a negative, the legend will live on. *Eve. Standard*, 19 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, 20 Sept; *D.Mail*, 3 Oct 2018; *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, 17 May; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 30 May 2019.

- Ravenmaster Skaife relates the following story: "One evening, I was shepherding the ravens to bed when I noticed a small girl sitting on the bench by their enclosure, watching me closely. Aged about 10, she had mousey-brown hair and was wearing modern clothes. Since the Tower

was shut, she wasn't likely to be some stranded visitor and I didn't recognise her as one of the residents' children. I've often felt a bit uncomfortable in this part of the Tower, but I try not to dwell on that fact. Unsure what to say, I asked politely if she could move, because the ravens would be unwilling to enter the enclosure if she didn't. She looked up at me and smiled slightly, but said nothing. Anyway, I thought I'd deal with the ravens first, so I unlocked Munin and Jubilee's enclosure, which takes just a moment. When I turned back, the girl had disappeared. It would have been impossible for her to have walked past me without my noticing, but she was gone. Vanished. I was so unnerved I went to look for her, searching the entire Inner Ward, an area enclosed by a massive wall and 13 towers. I found nothing, and to this day, no one knows anything about that little girl." [From *Ravenmaster: My Life With The Ravens At The Tower Of London* by Christopher Skaife, Fourth Estate, 2018.]

For more on the Tower Ravens, see Jeffrey Vallance, "The Ravens of London", FT206:30-36.





SIDELINES...

WIZARD OPPORTUNITY

Boleskine House above Loch Ness has been put up for sale, along with 22 acres (9ha) of land, for £510,000. Occultist Aleister Crowley lived in the B-listed Georgian pile, near Foyers, and allegedly carried out magic rituals there between 1899 and 1913. It was later owned by Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page, and is reported to be haunted. It was badly damaged by fire in December 2015. *BBC News*, 23 Dec 2015, 15 April; *Sun*, 16 April 2019.

SCARELORE IN NORFOLK

False rumours that Romanians were trying to abduct children in Great Yarmouth, the Norfolk seaside resort, have spread via Facebook. Police found no evidence to support the claims. At least 4,000 people from Eastern Europe live in the town. *BBC News*, 7 May 2019.

MAKE RUSSIA STRONG AGAIN

A Siberian shaman whose group killed and burnt five camels to “strengthen Russia” defended the ritual. Artur Tsybikov, of the Eternally Blue Sky group in Angarsk, said the “humane” ceremony was held once every 300 years and that “we must not disobey the gods”. *Times*, 1 Mar 2019.

PANDORA'S BOX

A 2008 laptop infested with six of the most notorious computer viruses – including Wannacry and DarkTequila – has sold for just over £1 million in an online auction. The Persistence of Chaos, created by artist Guo O Dong and NY cybersecurity firm Deep Instinct, runs on Windows XP. Ports and Internet capabilities have been disabled. The artist says it serves as “a kind of bestiary”. *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 29 May 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

PARROT FASHION

Hardened criminals, jealous pets, and compulsive online shoppers



ABOVE: The “drug-trafficking parrot” arrested during a raid on a drug den in Brazil. The criminal bird is being rehabilitated and taught to fly at a local zoo.

● A parrot was taken into custody in northern Brazil following a police raid targeting crack dealers. The green and white bird had been taught to alert criminals to police operations in Vila Irmã Dulce, a low-income community in the sun-scorched capital of Piauí state, by shouting: “Mum, the police!” The parrot was seized on 22 April when officers swooped on a drug den run by a local couple. “As soon as the police got close he started shouting,” said an officer involved in the operation. Drugs, including crack and marijuana, were found at the property, as well as large amounts of money. A journalist described the imprisoned parrot as a “super obedient” creature – albeit one that had kept its beak firmly shut after being “arrested”. The Brazilian broadcaster Globo said the “papagaio do tráfico” (drug-trafficking parrot) had been handed over to a local zoo in Teresina, where it would spend three months learning to fly before being released. *theguardian.com*, 24 April 2019.

● Four years ago, a turquoise-fronted Amazonian parrot was brought to a zoo in the southern Brazilian city of Cascavel, having been severely injured in a shootout between police and gangsters during a raid on the drug den where he had lived with his villain owner. Because of his

bullet-disfigured face, he was called Freddy Krueger after the character in *Nightmare on Elm Street*. “In the shootout, [Freddy] was hit in the upper-beak... blinded and suffered burns to the feathers that grow between the eyes,” according to Brazil’s *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper. Then, last April, Freddy was bitten on the leg by a snake. He bled profusely but survived, only to be stolen on 16 April when three armed raiders burst into the zoo, overpowered its security guard and made off with two parrots and a gas cylinder. Two days later, however, Freddy returned, discovered by zoo staff at the foot of a pine tree beside his cage. The details of his comeback remain murky, although drops of blood found near his former abode have fuelled speculation that the notoriously aggressive bird bit his way out. “He’s a bit of a wild one,” said Ilair Dettoni,

the zoo’s vet, who suspected Freddy’s mangled features might have proven his salvation, given the limited market for deformed parrots. “I don’t know if Freddy is really unlucky or really lucky,” he said. The second parrot and the gas cylinder had yet to be found. *theguardian.com*, 29 April 2019.

● Firefighters who raced to a suspected house fire in Daventry, Northamptonshire, found a parrot impersonating a fire alarm. They banged on Steve Dockerty’s door after being alerted by the alarm company – but the emergency call was down to Steve’s 17-year-old African grey parrot, Jazz. Staff at the company that monitors Mr Dockerty’s alarm called him after the smoke detector was triggered in error; hearing the bird in the background, they called the fire brigade. Mr Dockerty, 63, adopted Jazz a year earlier to give his other parrot, Kiki, 16, some company. *BBC News*, 16 Nov; *Sun*, 17 Nov 2018.

● Buddy, an African grey parrot in London, has used Amazon’s Alexa to order golden gift boxes [FT369:24]. Rocco, another African grey, was removed from the National Animal Welfare Trust in Berkshire because staff didn’t want him effing and blinding on public display. Trust worker Marion Wischniewski, 49, took him to her home in Didcot, Oxfordshire, where he fell in love with Alexa, using the virtual assistant to order strawberries, water melon, raisins, broccoli and ice cream – as well as a kite, light bulbs and a kettle. He also



ABOVE: Freddy Kreuger has survived a shootout, a snake bite and an abduction.



likes to dance, and tells the voice-activated device to play his favourite tunes. “Often I come home from being out all day and find romantic music playing,” said Ms Wischnewski. “And he loves a boogie with Alexa, but it has to be something fast, like his favourite, Kings of Leon. Rocco and Alexa chat away to each other all day. Then I have to check the shopping list and cancel all the items he’s ordered.” *Sun, D.Mail, 14 Dec 2018.*

- Petra, an African grey Congo parrot belonging to a woman in Florida, uses Alexa to irritate. The mischievous bird orders it to turn the lights on and off at unusual hours. Petra’s owner said: “You’re half awake and you’re like, ‘Was that a dream? Did that just happen?’ All day, every day, it’s lights on, lights off.” *Love It!, 7 June 2018.*

- A mother of three says Gobby, the family’s parrot, is jealous of her husband and wants to usurp him after she filmed the bird imitating his voice while sternly telling off their 15-month-old son. Hayley Kirby-Bulmer, from Weyhill, Hampshire, was amazed when Gobby pointed his claw at toddler Leon and said “Stop it” and “No”. She said: “Leon had been crying for 45 minutes and nothing I was doing was calming him down. Then Gobby just started to say ‘Stop it’ and whistling. Leon just stopped. I couldn’t believe it. I had been replaced by a parrot. My son had decided to listen to a bird and not his own mum.” Gobby also encourages Leon, who has digestion problems, to eat all his food by saying ‘Good boy’, “Yum” and “Thank you, daddy”. But Gobby is silent when her husband Karsten, 43, is home and “can’t stand” him and “just wants to be the only man in the house,” she said. “When we let him out he goes straight for Karsten, he dive bombs him.” *Metro, 27 Nov 2017.*

- A parrot found wandering around Dublin Airport’s runway was reunited with its owner after it recognised a foreign language it had been taught. Efforts to locate the rightful owner resulted in four people coming



ABOVE: Marion Wischnewski and her African grey parrot, Buddy, who has used Amazon’s Alexa to order strawberries, ice cream, a kite, light bulbs and a kettle.

forward. Lubomir Michna claimed he had taught the African grey, called Hugo, a few words of Slovak and recorded an audio clip to be played to the bird. When the recording was played, Hugo reacted instantly, becoming animated and excited. When Mr Michna arrived, Hugo was thrilled. “As soon as the carrier was opened, Hugo jumped onto Lubomir’s arm and cuddled into his neck,” said Dan Donohoe from Kildare Animal Foundation. “It was lovely.” *Irish Independent, 23 Feb; D.Telegraph, 23 Feb 2019.*

- Blushing was once considered a peculiar characteristic of humans, but scientists have discovered that we share this involuntary reaction with parrots, whose cheeks also redden in social situations. Five hand-reared blue-and-yellow macaws were studied by researchers keen to understand the birds’ complex social lives. When their human handlers

actively interacted with them, by chatting and maintaining eye contact, they ruffled their head feathers and blushed on their bare cheeks. Aline Bertin of the INRA Centre Val de Loire in France said: “Although caution must be exercised when interpreting these data due to the small sample size, we argue that crown ruffling and skin colour variation may provide facial indicators of bird’s inner subjective feelings.” The study was published in the journal *PLOS One*. *D.Telegraph, 24 Aug 2018.*

- And here’s one from the vaults: Sparky, an African grey, sat in the window of a house in York leering at passers-by, squawking: “Show us your knickers!” or “Wanker!” Following a complaint, officials told his owner’s landlady, Paula Bedford, that any more avian bad manners could lead to eviction. *Independent on Sunday, 11 Feb 2007.*

SIDELINES...

BATTMAN TO THE RESCUE

Cameron Battman, 25, pulled axe-wielding Steven Walton, 42, off his bike as he left a convenience store in Hartlepool, Co. Durham, with a bagful of stolen cash. He kicked the axe away and held the robber until police arrived. A judge awarded him £250 for his bravery. *D.Mirror, 16 Jan 2019.*

STIFF SENTENCE

Kasim Khuram, 23, of Aston, Birmingham, high on Mamba, PCP and vodka, broke into a Co-operative funeral parlour, disturbed nine coffins, and had sex with a dead woman. He was jailed for six years. The judge said: “I am not aware of – nor have I been able to find – any similar case.” (He should read *FT*). *D.Telegraph, 20 Dec 2018; BBC News, 1 Feb 2019.*

WHAT’S THE RUSH?

On 17 March, a drunken 30-year-old man from Heidelberg, armed with a fire extinguisher, smashed his way into the driver’s cab of a high-speed train running from Frankfurt to Paris and told the shocked driver the train was going much too fast and he had to save the passengers. The train stopped near Frankfurt and was taken out of service. The unnamed man was arrested. *[AP] 18 Mar 2019.*

POTHOLE LUCK

A man aged 59 with atrial fibrillation and chest pains was cured when his ambulance hit a pothole in Omaha, Nebraska. His heart rate dropped from 200 beats a minute to a normal rate. Doctors said such jolts could have a restorative effect similar to that of an electric shock. *Times, 23 April; Sunday Mirror, 5 May 2019.*



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

BRITAIN'S DULLEST

Nick West, 59, of Langford, Somerset, has been voted the Dullest Man in Britain in an online poll – after amassing 9,300 empty beer cans. He started the UK's biggest can collection at the age of 16; his oldest can dates from 1936. In the poll, he beat a roundabout buff, a brick collector and a man who watches paint dry for a living. *Sun*, *D.Mail*, 11 April 2019.

KROKODIL ARRIVES

Emma Davies, 41, suffered horrific open sores after taking desomorphine, a homemade opiate 10 times the strength of heroin, known as krokodil because it causes grey scaly skin like crocodile scales. It has caused serious health problems in Russia, but has not been seen in the UK before. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Feb 2019.

HOW COULD THEY TELL?

Vietnamese authorities have told monks at a Buddhist pagoda to stop “bad karma eviction” ceremonies after an investigation found the rituals were a scam. Thousands had paid the Ba Vang pagoda in Quang Ninh province between £34 and £10,200 to have their bad karma vanquished. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Mar 2019.

STREAMLINED

A naked man was arrested in Moscow after trying to board an aeroplane while shouting about how clothes made him less agile and aerodynamic. Eyewitnesses said he passed through checks at Domodedovo Airport before stripping naked and running from the terminal towards the aircraft. <i>25 Mar 2019.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | Updates on the 'Havana Syndrome' mystery



ABOVE: The US Embassy in Havana, Cuba.

YAMIL LAGE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

SONIC ATTACK: NOT CRICKET? [FT370:26-27]



Some new developments to the mystery of ‘Havana syndrome’, the inexplicable health problems suffered by US and Canadian Embassy officials based in Cuba: Canadian diplomats are suing their own government for not having evacuated them promptly enough. Canada has discounted the US state department’s theory that the syndrome was caused by sonic attack.

The 14 officials, who are claiming £16m in damages, stated that “throughout the crisis, Canada downplayed the seriousness of the situation, hoarded and concealed critical health and safety information, and gave false, misleading and incomplete information to diplomatic staff”. One unnamed diplomat told CBS News: “My wife, she isn’t the same anymore. She has gaps in her memory, headaches, problems hearing. She picks up the telephone to make a call but forgets why,

enters rooms without reason”.

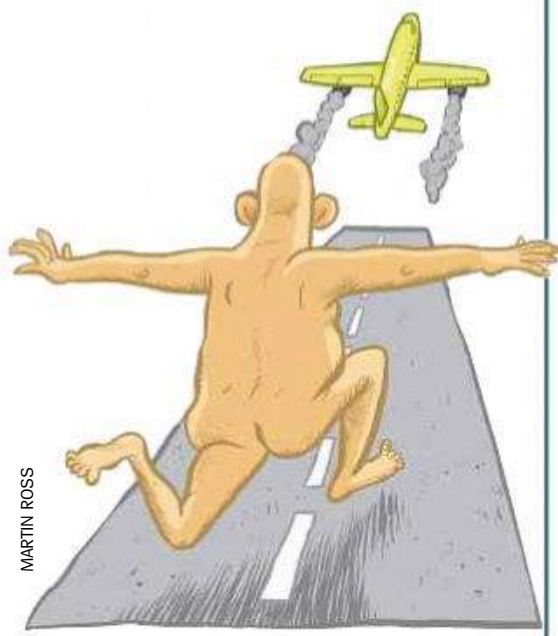
While the USA withdrew most of its non-essential Embassy staff in September 2017, Canada continued to post officials to its Havana-based Embassy until April 2018, despite warnings from US counterparts, although it did order the families of diplomatic staff to return home. In February 2019, following reports of another sick official (posted to Havana in summer 2018, fell ill in December), Canada announced plans to reduce its Embassy staff numbers from around 16 to a maximum of eight. Local guards were recruited to patrol residential properties as well as the Embassy itself.

Both US and Canadian diplomats based in Cuba began to fall ill in late 2016, and have continued to do so [FT359:22, 360:14, 363:4, 370:26-27] To date, 14 Canadian and 26 US Embassy officials have reported dizziness, headaches, nausea, insomnia and hearing loss. Some victims felt vibrations or abnormal pressure in their offices, whilst others heard a variety of sounds – shrill clangs,

loud ringing, metal scraping, grinding, a high-pitched drone, a low-pitched motor – before they fell ill. Experts remain baffled by the symptoms, which resemble concussion, but which lingered for weeks. A medical report commissioned by the US government (published in JAMA, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, in March 2018) diagnosed mild traumatic brain injury, possibly induced by sonic weaponry.

However, these findings have subsequently been contested by doctors from Germany, the UK and the US, in separate letters to JAMA, suggesting that the initial University of Pennsylvania investigative team misinterpreted test results, overlooked common disorders, and failed to consider psychological explanations.

For example, a specialist from Louisiana’s Ear and Balance Institute has argued that, rather than concussion, patients’ test results indicate inner-ear damage. Abnormalities in the vestibular system, which governs our sense of balance and the way that we perceive gravity and



MARTIN ROSS



acceleration, might be the cause of dizziness, headaches, nausea and hearing loss.

Robert Bartholomew, a leading expert in psychogenic illness (and FT contributor) criticised the initial report for having failed to rule out a psychological explanation. “There are several cases in the annals of mass psychogenic illnesses that parallel the audio perceptions and symptoms reported in the Cuban Embassy subjects”, he said.

Possibly supportive of ‘Havana syndrome’ being a psychogenic event (or, in cruder terms, mass hysteria), are the findings of a University of Lincoln professor of sensory biology. He suggested the loud whirring, droning noises recorded by Embassy staff were made by a local insect, the Indies short-tailed cricket, *Anurogryllus celerinictus*. Although this would not explain the vibrations or other unusual sensory phenomena experienced by patients, nor, of course, their variety of medical symptoms. And a University of California study found the Cuban Embassy recordings to be an imperfect match for *Anurogryllus*, having an uneven pulse structure not found in insects.

If Embassy staff were indeed deliberately targeted, the perpetrator(s) and motive remain unknown. In late 2018, US intelligence officials reported having intercepted communiqués pointing towards Russian culpability, naturally dismissed by Russia’s foreign ministry. The Cuban government too has adamantly denied any involvement, and Canada has confirmed the Cubans’ co-operation from the outset. By contrast, the Trump administration swiftly expelled 15 Cuban diplomats, not so much because US investigators had pinpointed Cuba as the cause of the mysterious illness, but because they felt Havana wasn’t helping them to find a solution.

Further to a US consulate worker stationed in Guangzhou, China, falling ill in May 2018, US officials in Beijing and Shanghai have also reported similar symptoms. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised the issue with Chinese foreign

minister Wang Yi, who said that a Chinese investigation had failed to uncover any cause for the illnesses. The US State Department withdrew 11 of its officials in June 2018.

JASON, an independent group of scientists who advise the US government on science and technology matters, sometimes with secretive or sensitive aspects, suggested microwaves as a possible cause. High-intensity microwave beams can create the sensation of loud noises, as well as induce nausea, headaches, vertigo and potential brain-tissue damage. They can also be fired covertly and directed at specific targets.

The Frey effect, named after US scientist Allan Frey, is a phenomenon whereby microwaves trick the brain into hearing phantom sounds. In the 1960s, the US Embassy in Moscow is known to have been bombarded with microwaves by the Soviets. More recently, the US military sought to develop microwave weaponry with the ability to beam painfully loud booms and even spoken words into a victim’s head.

Frey, a consultant to various US federal agencies, is known to have assisted in the ‘Havana syndrome’ investigation. He has speculated that a rogue Cuban faction allied to Russia deployed the microwave technology as a means to destabilise developing ties between Cuba and the US. But why also target Canadians?

Still another theory proposes bad engineering. In an article on the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) website, computer scientists and acoustics experts claimed to have reverse engineered the so-called ‘sonic weapon’ apparently deployed in Cuba. Ultrasonic frequencies, thought to be a key element of sonic weaponry, do not propagate well in air, and are inaudible, whereas several victims reported hearing high-pitched noises. In addition, a single ultrasonic frequency on its own would not be expected to cause the reported ear pain, headaches and dizziness. Instead, the IEEE report suggested that two signals, each with a different frequency, combined to create an effect known as inter-

modulation distortion which can produce audible sound (and other effects?). They suggest that Embassy rooms may have contained an ultrasonic jammer and an ultrasonic transmitter, whose two signals accidentally interfered with each other. Each device may have been placed there by different agencies, unaware of each other. Whilst these could have been deliberately deployed, the IEEE report leans towards an accident with unforeseen and unfortunate results.

The two countries’ formerly hostile relations were thawing under Obama’s administration, leading to the re-opening of the Havana Embassy in July 2015. The mystery illnesses began in November 2016, around the time of Trump’s election victory. Unlike Obama, Trump has taken a harder line against Cuba, albeit keeping the Embassy open. It would seem unlikely that Cuba would seek to further destabilise their already frosty relations with the US.

In 1980s England, women at the Greenham Common anti-nuclear peace camp claimed they had been subjected to microwave attack from inside the US air force base they were protesting. Symptoms ranged from mild headaches and drowsiness to temporary paralysis, and, in one case, an apparent circulatory failure requiring emergency treatment. Some protestors also complained of sharp pains and problems with speech co-ordination. A series of tests measuring electromagnetic radiation around the base detected a marked increase in signal levels when some women had created a disturbance outside the base’s perimeter fence, and on other occasions, an increased signal level had coincided with claims of ill-effects. *New Internationalist* no.160, June 1986; *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist*, 5 Jan; *spectrum.ieee.org*, 1 Mar; *Times*, 2 July; *Guardian*, 15 Aug; *Irish Times*, *D.Telegraph*, *Times*, 3 Sept, 12 Sept; [AP] 13 Dec 2018; *E.Standard*, 3 Jan + 7 Feb; *nytimes.com*, 4 Jan; *Guardian*, 7 Jan, 1 Feb; *Times*, *Irish Times*, Feb 1; *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 8 Feb 2019.

Christopher Josiffe

SIDELINES...

BURN THE WITCH

A mother and her son chanted “Death by fire! Death to Samantha!” at their neighbour, whom they believed to be a witch. Leonora Joseph, 76, and Mark Joseph, 56, were convinced Samantha Ginsberg had cast a spell on Ms Joseph, which had made her partially paralysed. She told a reporter outside Wimbledon Magistrate’s Court in south London: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”. The pair denied harassment. *Sun*, 22 Feb; *D.Mirror*, 29 Mar 2019.

BOONROD RESCUED

An exhausted dog discovered some 135 miles (220km) off the coast of Thailand on 12 April was rescued by oil rig workers after she was spotted paddling near a drilling platform. The brown mongrel swam towards the workers and was pulled to safety. How she had become stranded was unclear; perhaps she fell from a fishing trawler. The workers named her Boonrod (“survivor”). *BBC News*, *Metro*, 16 April 2019.

COUGAR WRESTLING #1

Travis Kauffman, 31, was halfway through a 12-mile run along ice-covered trails on Horsetooth Mountain, Colorado, on 4 February when he was attacked by a mountain lion, which latched onto his wrist and clawed at his face and legs. The pair tumbled down a steep bank. Kauffman was able to move his right leg close to his wrist, which was still in the grip of the lion’s teeth, and stepped on its windpipe until it suffocated. He needed 28 stitches. The dead lion was a juvenile, weighing about 35kg (77lb). Kauffman weighs 63kg (140lb). [AP] 6 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 16 Feb 2019.

COUGAR WRESTLING #2

On 29 March a young mountain lion attacked Zack Bromley, seven, outside his house in Vancouver Island, Canada. It leapt over a fence and bit his neck and arm. Hearing his screams, his mother Chelsea rushed outside to find him with the lion’s jaws clenched around his forearm. She jumped on the animal and tried unsuccessfully to prise its jaw open – until her screams for help caused it to flee. It was later killed by conservation officers. *Times*, 3 April 2019.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

READY TO ROOMBA

A house sitter in Portland, Oregon, called police on 8 April, saying someone was in the bathroom. Armed officers entered the house and heard “rustling” in the bathroom. After 10 minutes of calling the suspect to surrender, they burst in, guns drawn... to find a Roomba, a robotic vacuum cleaner, which had been programmed to begin working every day at 1.30pm. [AP] 10 April; *Guardian*, 13 April 2019.

ANTI-ANTIPOPE

An Italian priest who considers Pope Francis an “antipope” and claims to have supernatural communications with angels, saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary, has been excommunicated. Fr Alessandro Minutella was expelled from the Church for spreading “heresy and schism”, the archdiocese of Monreale in Sicily said. <i> 15 Nov 2018.

BOY WITH BANANA

An eight-year-old Russian boy left home in Astrakhan, leaving a note for his mother saying he was going “around the world”. For the journey, he took a set of encyclopædias, a toy aeroplane, money from his piggy bank, and a banana. He boarded three buses and was continuing on foot when he was found by a search team. *Irish Independent*, 6 April 2019.

GARDEN SNAKE

Bruce Baker’s children found a 7ft (2m) boa constrictor underneath a bicycle in their garden in Innerleithen, Scottish Borders, on 21 April. Mr Baker and a neighbour coaxed the snake into a plastic box until the Scottish SPCA arrived and took it to a rehoming centre. It was quite thin, so had probably been straying for some time. *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, 23 April 2019.

WAYWARD TOOTH

A 59-year-old man in Denmark had a tooth removed from inside his left nostril. He had complained of a blocked nose, discharge and loss of his sense of smell. He had fractured his jaw and nose in his youth, but doctors said there was no evidence to suggest repositioning following the accident was connected to the tooth in his nostril. *Irish Independent*, 1 Mar 2019.



ANDREW SIETSEMA / FACEBOOK

GHOST APPLES

Freezing rain on 6 February 2019 produced a stunning sight at an orchard in west Michigan. “Ghost apples” were left hanging from tree branches, completely devoid of the fruit’s typical peel or core. “I guess it was just cold enough that the ice covering the apple hadn’t melted yet, but it was warm enough that the apple inside turned to complete mush (apples have a lower freezing point

than water),” said Andrew Sietsema, who took the photographs.

“When I pruned a tree it would be shaken in the process, and the mush would slip out of the bottom of the ghost apple. Most apples just fell off, ice and all, but quite a few would leave a cool ghost apple behind... Jonagolds are one of my favourite apple varieties, but we’ll call these ‘Jonaghosts’.” *accuweather.com*, 8 Feb 2019.



Transient lunar phenomena

DAVID HAMBLING examines possible explanations for mysterious glows and flashes on the Moon

For centuries astronomers have noted flashes, coloured glows or mists appearing briefly on the face of our nearest planetary neighbour. In 1968, British astronomer Patrick Moore coined the term transient lunar phenomenon (TLP) to describe them, and the term stuck. TLPs invariably disappeared before more telescopes could be brought to bear, and they remain deeply enigmatic. Their existence is so troubling that until recently some astronomers preferred to believe they were illusory.

There is no shortage of people claiming to have seen extraordinary things on the Moon. In 1835, *The Sun*, a New York newspaper, carried a series of six articles claiming to report new telescopic discoveries by Sir John Herschel – lunar vegetation, animals and finally human-like man-bats.¹ Such tall tales rarely receive attention from the scientific community, but reports by credible observers are another matter.

In 1787 William Herschel, father of John Herschel whose name was used in the 1835 hoax, reported three glowing red spots in the dark part of the Moon. He assumed these were volcanic eruptions. In 1958, Russian astronomer Nikolai Kozyrev observed a glow that appeared for half an hour in the Alphonsus crater, and took spectroscopic readings. In 1963, astronomers at the Observatoire du Pic-du-Midi in France took the first photographs of a luminous phenomenon on the Moon.

During the Apollo 11 mission, German astronomers noted a glow close to the landing site. When this information was passed on to the astronauts, Michael Collins reported back from the orbiter: “Hey, Houston, I’m looking north up toward Aristarchus now, and there’s an area that is considerably more illuminated than the surrounding area. It seems to have a slight amount of fluorescence”.

A 2013 catalogue noted some 3,000 instances of TLPs. This could simply be a sign that the Moon has a large amount of volcanic activity, except for the established scientific evidence that it is geologically dead, hence sightings have often been doubted. Herschel’s red glows appeared at the same time as the aurora borealis, and in other cases high-altitude clouds, telescopic flaws, and even psychological effects were blamed. However, with space-based telescopes, photography and Collins’s observation from up close, it has become more accepted that there is something behind the reports.

While there has been little systematic attempt to observe TLPs, Hakan Kayal of



the University of Würzburg believes they are worthy of further study. He has set up a telescope that will put the Moon under permanent surveillance, automatically recording any luminous effects. This should at least give some idea of the frequency, intensity and location of TLPs, though it may not tell us much about their underlying cause.

Typical TLPs appear to be reddish or pinkish, and are sometimes described as sparkling or flowing. They may be around 10 miles (16km) across, with brighter spots two of three miles across, and last for around 20 minutes with a faint lingering glow for some time afterwards.

Perhaps the most obvious cause of TLPs would be ‘impact events’ when meteorites slam into the surface of the Moon. The counter-argument is that there has been only one observation of a new crater in the wake of a TLP. Also, with no atmosphere to slow it down, impact dust should settle rapidly. More seriously, impacts should be distributed randomly all over the Moon, whereas TLPs appear to cluster in certain areas. Almost half have been observed in the vicinity of the crater Aristarchus.

Outgassing is a popular explanation, given that emissions of radioactive radon and argon gas have been detected in a number of lunar prospecting missions. While the Moon is volcanically inactive, moonquakes can be produced by tidal forces and by the heating and cooling cycle. However, the quantities involved in known outgasings have been tiny, and it is not clear how they could be bright enough to be seen from Earth.

Another alternative is luminescence: Moon rocks glowing in response to bombardments of X-rays or particles like

LEFT: A “lunar flare” photographed on 15 November 1953 by Leon H Stuart in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

protons in solar storms. This would help explain the unusual colours. But there is not much support from lunar geology for the luminescence theory, and a 1966 study showed no correlation between TLPs and solar activity.

Beyond this there are more exotic theories. American and Russian missions have detected small quantities of levitating dust, and computer models have shown how particles could pick up a charge from the solar wind, repel each other and levitate. This might give rise to ‘dust fountains’ which could catch the light, possibly explaining the glow on the horizon seen on some lunar missions. At high enough altitude, these might even produce the sort of red glow seen by Herschel. The theory remains speculative.

More entertainingly for fortune tellers, some have suggested that TLPs may be the lunar equivalent of the earthquake lights seen on Earth, produced when rocks are split open (see pp44-49 for more on EQLs). These are a subject of some debate, but calculations suggest that on being fractured, helium-rich Moon rocks could produce a pinkish glow visible from Earth. If this proves to be the cause of TLP, then it might give a boost to investigations of quake lights down here.

No human being has set foot on the Moon since 1972, but a new space race is under way. The Chinese Chang’e 4 rover explored the far side of the Moon in January 2019, and there are plans for more missions culminating in a manned landing in the 2030s. Meanwhile, NASA’s Artemis program tentatively aims to put the first female astronaut on the Moon in 2024, as part of a larger effort aimed at Mars.

Having some boots on the ground may help our understanding of TLPs. The more observers and the more scientific instruments there are on the Moon, the better the chances of gathering good data, or even witnessing and recoding a TLP from the inside. On the other hand, a lunar presence may simply produce many more sightings of weird, inexplicable lights.

NOTE

1 For an account of the 1835 hoax, see *The Sun and the Moon* by Matthew Goodman (Basic Books, New York, 2008) and Brian Regal, “When Beavers Roamed the Moon”, **FT109:28-30**. For a round-up of more recent sightings of giant spacecraft, lunar bases and alien structures on the Moon, see **FT380:34-41**.

PAUL SIEVEKING catalogues some intriguing coin finds from Australia, Utah and England



ABOVE LEFT: A Kilwa coin bought online (left) and the suspected example found in Australia. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The rare coin depicting Ulpius Cornelius Laelianus.

• In the past six years, archaeologist Mike Hermes and other academics have mounted seven expeditions off the coast of northern Australia, finding previously undiscovered rock art, shipwrecks and stone tools. On a field trip to the Wessel Islands, off north-east Arnhem Land in July 2018, Hermes found a coin he believes comes from the Kilwa sultanate, now a World Heritage ruin on an island off Tanzania in East Africa, and dating from before 1400. Its surface is eroded, obscuring identifying features, but Hermes is confident. “We’ve weighed and measured it, and it’s pretty much a dead ringer for a Kilwa coin,” he said. It was lying in the intertidal zone off Elcho Island. Kilwa once was a flourishing trade port with links to India in the 13th to 16th century. Kilwa’s copper coins were the first coins ever produced in sub-Saharan Africa.

Back in 1944, Maurie Isenberg, an RAAF radar operator stationed briefly on nearby Marchinbar Island, discovered five Kilwa coins while sitting in the sand with his fishing rod. In 1979 he rediscovered the coins stashed away in a tin, and handed them over to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. The coins, dating from the 10th to the 14th century, were apparently forgotten again until anthropologist Ian McIntosh got the ball rolling in 2013 when he led an expedition to the Wessel Islands that failed to unearth any more coins. The latest coin find is 100 miles (160km) from where Isenberg claimed to have found his. Outside Africa, Kilwa coins have only been found in Oman and the Wessel Islands. “It’s a puzzling distribution,” said Hermes.

Historian Mike Owen said the coins could indicate contact between Aboriginal Australians and traders from Kilwa 700 years ago. The Wessel Islands were probably not the intended destination for the coins. There was trade between Kilwa and China, and possibly those traders were blown off course or escaping from pirates. Perhaps there was a shipwreck. But Owen said the most likely scenario is that the Portuguese,

who looted Kilwa in 1505, went on to set foot on Australian shores, bringing the coins with them. “The Portuguese were in Timor in 1514, 1515 – to think they didn’t go three more days east with the monsoon wind is ludicrous,” said Hermes. *theguardian.com*, 11 May; *news.com.au*, 14 May 2019.



• Two Spanish coins (above), one from the 13th century and the other a 16 Maravedí of Philip IV minted in Madrid in 1662/63, were found by a hiker on the desert floor near the Halls Crossing Marina on Lake Powell in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Utah. The first Europeans recorded in Utah are the Spanish expedition of 1765 led by explorer Juan Antonio de Rivera. He claimed the area for Spain and found the Colorado river. Then in 1776, Franciscan priests led by Father Atanasio Dominguez and Father Silvestre Velez de Escalante came through as they tried to find a route from Santa Fe to California, and then came back after their trip was unsuccessful.

The coins may have been imported from Europe by early Spanish settlers or explorers, traded with native American tribes, possibly in Mexico, and then lost in the canyon; however, the great disparity in age between the coins indicates they didn’t circulate at the same time and may have been dropped by a coin collector. “This is not necessarily as unlikely as it sounds,” said Dr Rory Naismith, lecturer in mediæval British history at King’s College London. “A 19th-century shipwreck off the south coast of England was found to be full of ancient and mediæval coins from the Mediterranean. Old coins were also a

favoured souvenir for soldiers returning from the Middle East in the two World Wars.” *dailymail.com*, 9 May 2019.

• An “incredibly rare” coin has been found in a ditch at a small Roman farmstead during a dig as part of Highways England’s £1.5bn scheme to improve the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon. It depicts Ulpius Cornelius Laelianus, who reigned for about two months in AD 269 before being killed, probably by his own soldiers. It was only the second coin of its kind to be unearthed in England. The ill-fated emperor sized power and ruled a breakaway territory in what is now Germany and France. Another unusual coin discovered during the dig was a Gallic War uniface coin, minted in 57 BC by the Ambiani tribe in the Somme area of modern-day France. Experts speculate it was exported to help fund the British Celtic resistance to Julius Cæsar. *BBC News*, 18 May 2019.

• A seventh century counterfeit of a gold Merovingian tremissis (below), originally minted in Dorestad in the Netherlands between AD 630 and 650, was found by a detectorist in a ploughed field near Woodbridge in Suffolk in 2016. Both obverse and reverse have what numismatists called “blundered legends” (inscriptions spelt wrongly). The coin was probably used for jewellery, as it had been pierced and there was a general lack of wear. It is about 0.3g lighter than the real thing and was probably made in the decades after 650 (a generation after the Sutton Hoo ship burial nearby). *BBC News*, 31 Mar 2019.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

238: OR ELSE...

Apart from Trump's daily diatribes, Boris's Brexit policy is seen by many as the ultimate ultimatum. Our English word comes from mediæval/neo-Latin, going back to classical Ultimatum.

The first recorded use of our word is in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 1 (1731, p39) concerning diplomatic manoeuvres leading to that year's Treaty of Vienna.

Some online dictionaries claim that in the early 1800s 'ultimata' comported the slang meaning of 'buttocks'. I can see the anatomic logic but in terms of an actual source I've not got to the bottom of this.

Nemo me impune lacessit – Nobody challenges me and gets away with it... Most famous as the Scottish slogan – doesn't extend to their national football team – but widely adopted elsewhere by many military regiments and sundry other groups.

Many good examples from ancient to modern times. Herodotus (bk6 chs48-9, bk7 ch133) says that Persian King Darius, prior to his invasion of Greece (culminating in Marathon), sent envoys to Athens and Sparta with earth and water, traditional tokens of submission. The Athenians threw them down a pit as common criminals. Spartans tossed them down a well, saying if they wanted earth and water that was the place to find them.

(But they were in the well, said Alice. Of course they were said the dormouse – well in)

For a somewhat sceptical discussion of these episodes, see Raphael Sealey, *Classical Journal* 72 (1976), 13-20 – available online.

A century or so later, Macedonian King Philip II (Alexander's dad) menacingly asked the Spartans if he should approach them as friend or foe. Spartan reply – Neither.

The angry monarch then threatened, "If I bring my army into your territory, I will destroy your farms, slay your people, raze your city."

Laconic reply – "IF" (presaging Kipling and Lindsay Anderson). These anecdotes retailed by Plutarch (*Spartan Sayings*, ch223 para1; *On Garrulity*, ch17 para1).

Modern Greeks kept up the tradition. On 28 October 1940 military dictator Ioannis Metaxas answered Mussolini's surrender ultimatum with – "OXI!" ("NO!")

As, more emphatically, did Mrs Thatcher in 1990, responding to the European



Council's demand for greater powers – "NO! NO! NO!" (a moment immortalised on YouTube). Or, as the *Sun* more colourfully put it – "Up Yours Delors!"

The Spartans would have approved General McAuliffe's reply during the Battle of The Bulge to German demands for surrender – "NUTS!"

Pope Leo X's order to the people of Ravenna (1519) to surrender the bones of Dante suits both ancient and modern collectors of 'forteana'. Their response was COME AND GET THEM. When his Florentines arrived, the bones had mysteriously vanished, supposedly spirited away by Dante's shade: see various websites, plus Dianne Halles, *La Bella Lingua* (2009), p76.

The Romans unsurprisingly feature prominently in this catalogue. In 172 BC, Popilius Læna was sent with an ultimatum to King Antiochus IV to abort his planned attack on Alexandria. When the latter prevaricated, Popilius drew a circle around him with his ambassador's wand and said, "Before you step out of that, give me your answer." The astounded monarch immediately succumbed.

Back in 218, Roman envoys arrived in Carthage to demand the surrender of Hannibal. Their leader quashed the fruitless arguments by pointing to his toga folds with the words, "I give you peace or war; you choose." The Carthaginians replied that it was up to him. He offered war, they accepted at once. Bad decision; they would lose (Appian, *Spanish Wars*, bk3 ch13).

Perhaps the Americans should similarly have dealt with the Taliban when demanding they hand over Osama Bin Laden...

Later, in 29 BC, the Bastarnæ tribe sent delegates to Roman general Crassus bidding him halt his campaign against them. The latter craftily gave them warm welcome, making them drunk since in this way the notoriously drink-sodden Scythians would divulge all their plans to him (Dio Cassius, bk51 ch24).

Dio Cassius (bk9 ch39) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* bk19 ch5) provide the most lurid episode. In 282 BC, Roman ambassadors arrived at Tarentum (= Taranto, in southern Italy) to demand war reparations. They came in their posh, formal togas, thinking to impress the locals. Instead, they were met with laughter, urine, and defecation over their leader, Lucius Postumius Megellus. As the Tarentines guffawed, Lucius responded: "Laugh while you can. You'll be crying for a long time when you wash these clothes with your blood."

His prophecy, of course, came true; Rome would crush Tarentum. For ancillary sources and full details, see Mary Beard's astute description in her *Laughter in Ancient Rome* (2014), p4.

By the way, in his great 2015 debate with Beard over who were greater, Greeks or Romans, Boris declared "The Romans were bastards" – She won the debate by audience votes... If you missed this gigantomachy, it's on YouTube.

Perhaps Theresa May should count herself lucky not to have been met with this style of Euro-negotiation – Mrs Thatcher, of course, would simply have handbagged the lot.

All this, though, is put in the shade by events of 1945. In July, the Potsdam Declaration demanded unconditional surrender from Japan. The country's Prime Minister's response ended with the word 'Mokusatsu'. This highly ambiguous term could connote either silent contempt or a delay for consideration. Official English translations took the first as a provocative intent to pursue the war. Result – HIROSHIMA.

Numerous websites provide the complete details of this monumental linguistic blunder, which sadly serves to endorse the old saying Nothing Is Improved By Translation Except A Bishop.

Now, Read This Column – OR ELSE...

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the weirdest news items from across Europe – from ABCs to UFOs

CHRIST OF LIGHT

When he took a photo of a beam of light that pierced the sky above the sea at Agropoli, Salerno, Italy, on 1 March, Alfredo Lo Brutto found the resulting image resembled the form of Christ with open arms, similar to the famous statue in Rio de Janeiro. He called his shot “The Christ of Light on the Sea of Agropoli”, and it went viral on social media. *L’Arena*, 2 Mar 2019.

EPIC VULTURE FLIGHT

A cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) nicknamed Brínzola and born in 2016 in a Spanish breeding station in the Sierra de la Demanda, some 50km (30 miles) east of Burgos, took to the air on 20 April 2019, leaving Spain and heading north. Its movements can be followed as it carries a tracking device. It flew over the French Basque country, and reached Belgium on 9 May, where more than 200 photographers gathered to snap a picture of the majestic bird. It reached Germany the day after, passing the southern Netherlands, and was joined by a second specimen over northern Germany. It travelled some 250km (155 miles) in just five hours, and then sailed over Denmark on 14 May. The bird flew over Sweden, reaching Växjö on 16 May, and had reached Norway the following day, where it remains at the time of writing. <https://netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de/>, 15 May 2019.

Also far from its usual haunts was a vulture which landed near Novara, northern Italy, in April. The female, born in 2016, had a tracking device which showed she had flown from her usual haunts at the eastern end of the Pyrenees, in France. Further vultures have been reported over Maastricht (on the Belgian side of the river), on the Baltic island of Rügen, and in Bavaria, Germany. *Provincia di Lecco*, 25 April 2019.



ABOVE: “The Christ of Light on the Sea of Agropoli” in Alfredo Lo Brutto’s photo.
BELOW: This photo of the ‘Como Panther’ proved to be just an urban fox.

ALIEN BIG CATS

The Como puma, or panther (see FT375:23, 378:16), continues to be seen. On the afternoon of 7 March, Monica Mancuso from Fino Mornasco saw it cross a street: “It had a long tail, pointed ears, was of medium size and had light brown hair. I have no doubt the puma crossed my path.” The animal had a limp, and it was feared it had been hurt. Police warned it might become dangerous if it couldn’t hunt properly due to its injury. At the end of April, an Erba man saw a large animal in his courtyard, and “recalling the numerous sightings and the many articles, I immediately

thought it was the puma”. He took a clear snap – which shows that it was actually a fox. According to the witness, animals from dogs to cows were in a state of alarm when the “cat” appeared. *Provincia di Lecco*, 8+9 Mar, 26 Apr 2019.

Meanwhile, police in Bochum, Germany, were searching for a lynx. This was the real thing – a two-year-old male that had escaped in November 2018 from an animal park at Haltern am

See, near Recklinghausen, after someone cut a hole in the wire fence. The cat was seen and photographed on 10 March near Herne, and spotted again over the following days. After further sightings in



April and May in Castrop-Rauxel and Bochum-Werne, the lynx was finally captured. On 11 May, the animal was frightened by a hunter’s dogs in Bochum and fled up a tree, where it was caught by animal park employees. *Netzwerk für Kryptozoologie*, 13 May 2019.

WEIRD GERMANY

When police investigated a farm at Feldbach in Styria, Austria, responding to reports that the pigs there were very emaciated, they discovered the bodies of 70 to 80 mummified pigs. The animals had all died in the last 20 years. There is no information as to whether the farmer hoarded the dead animals or whether they had been preserved by natural causes. *web.de*, 13. Apr 2019.

In April, several strange incidents were reported from Germany. A woman from Lübeck called police because she was not happy with the way her hairdresser had dyed her hair. She had been back to him three times, but no matter what he did the colour just didn’t look right! Police explained that the emergency phone line was reserved for real emergencies, not for hairstyle advice. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 6 Apr 2019.

In a similar case only a few days later, a Lüdenscheld woman called the cops because of damage to her car. She had found spots of colour on the bodywork. Police came, investigated, and found the mysterious spots were bird droppings. *web.de*, 9 April 2019.

A bizarre suicide pact excited Germany in mid-May. On 11 May, police found three bodies in a Passau, Bavaria, guesthouse, together with three crossbows. A 53-year-old man and a 33-year-old woman, holding hands, lay dead on a bed, with a third female corpse on the floor beside them. This last woman, 30 years old,



UNO MURGELER / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: The Passau guesthouse where three corpses and three crossbows were found. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The 'UFO' photographed from an airliner above the Aegean – sceptics concluded it was a Greek Air Force fighter jet. **BELOW:** The 'missing' Verona monkey, last seen with friends on 15 April, turned out to be a publicity stunt.

had killed the others with a crossbow, and the last will of two of the deceased was found on a table. Two days later, the girlfriend of the woman beside the bed was discovered dead, along with another woman, in her house in Wittingen, Lower-Saxony, some 600km (373 miles) distant, and two days later; the causes of death were unknown. Further details gradually came to light. All five of the deceased knew each other and their life was centred on the dead man, who taught sword fighting, kept a shop selling equipment for mediæval reenactors and – so it seemed – was the lover of all four of the dead women. The tabloids spoke of a sex cult, while the police preferred to describe it as a case of extended suicide. *Der Westen*, 14 May; *Welt* 15 May 2019.

MYSTERIOUS ILLNESSES AND PANICS

There were several gas scares in Germany recently. In Unkel, on the Rhine, panic broke out in a shopping mall after firefighters were informed of a smell of gas. However, their measuring instruments found nothing. Despite this, 55 people complained about irritation of the eyes and breathing difficulties, and had to be hospitalised. Two days later, police explained that the cause of the irritation had to remain

“unexplained”. (*Honnef-heute.de*, 20 + 21 Feb 2019) In April, a gas alarm was sounded in nearby St Augustin-Menden; again, no agent was found. *WDR TV news*, 29 Apr 2019.

In March, a strange illness was reported from Spain. The Hospital General Universitario of Alicante reported the case of a 31-year-old unnamed woman who came to the emergency room suffering from vomiting and breathing problems and with reddened skin all over her body. The medics found she was allergic to the amoxicillin in her husband's sperm, and had reacted to it after she had felled him. *ABC, Madrid*, 14 Mar 2019.

PROPHECIES

Bulgarian prophet Baba Vanga, born as Vangelia Pandeva Dimitrova in 1911, died in 1996 (see **FTFT93:8, 351:20-21**), but the blind “Nostradamus of the Balkans” left behind prophecies that covered the period following her death. She is said to have predicted 9/11, the 2004 tsunami, and even Brexit. By the time you read this, all or part of the following predictions she made concerning 2019 may have come true (or not). There will be assassination attempts by their own security teams on both Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump; Trump will become deaf from a “mystery

illness”; Brexit will cause economic problems; and there will be severe earthquakes and tsunamis which will completely destroy large parts of Pakistan, India, China, Japan and Indonesia. *RTL.de*, 28 Dec 2018.

SEEN IN THE SKIES

UFOs seldom hit the headlines in Germany, but when an airline passenger filmed a supposed UFO over the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece, possibly in March 2019, it became news even on the web pages of mainstream magazines. The film was taken through the airplane's window and shows a massive grey-black contrail-like object cutting through a layer of clouds. Critical investigators concluded it was an F-4 fighter jet of the Greek Air Force. *stern.de*, 27 Mar 2019.

What was the mysterious UFO that fell over Cogollos de Guadix?” asked the Spanish newspaper *ABC* on 13 February 2019. In the afternoon of 10 February, several neighbours observed three mysterious lights flashing across the sky at great speed, each of which came down and impacted in different parts of the village in Granada. One of the objects hit and destroyed the roof of a house, which luckily was empty at the time. Experts, like José María Madieto, professor at the Universidad de Huelva,

ruled out meteorites as they would have been seen for many miles around, and the observations had been purely local. For the same reasons, other experts suggested the damage was due to ball lightning.

MONKEY BUSINESS

Flyers reading “Wanted monkey”, apparently seeking help in the search for a lost pet, appeared all over the northern Italian city of Verona. They gave little information besides the primate's birthday (31 May) and the phone numbers of its alleged owner. The monkey was said to have disappeared on 15 April, “after having spent the day with us and our friends”. The whole thing, which was widely shared on social media, was later revealed as a publicity stunt for a new shop. *L'Arena*, 9 May 2019.





The ghosts of Torre Abbey

ALAN MURDIE surveys the spectres of a Devon estate, from a Spanish Lady to a Radiant Boy

Standing in parkland close to the English Riviera seafront of Torquay are the ruins of the once glorious Torre Abbey. All that remains of one of the richest monastic houses in England, where monks worked and worshipped for centuries, lies adjacent to a fine 18th century mansion that incorporates sections of the ancient stonework in its foundations. Since 1930 the mansion has operated as a municipal museum and art gallery, enhanced by extensive restoration in recent years. Naturally, such an antique set of ruins and the accompanying property are said to be haunted.

Each era in the history of Torre Abbey has laid down a fresh stratum of ghostly stories, inspired by the lives and fates of those who once lived and died in the vicinity. Traceable within these traditions are echoes of the clash between the Protestant and Catholic faiths during the 16th and 17th centuries, which saw the monks expelled from their home and the buildings turned to secular usage.

Torre Abbey was originally founded in 1196 by monks from the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré in France, with the backing of the Lord of the Manor, William Brewer. We may presume that the first monks who dedicated themselves to lives of prayer acted initially from spiritual motives, driven by a sense of piety and the urge for mystical unity with God. However, that they were not entirely removed from the affairs of this world is demonstrated in their canny acquisition of the fishing rights to Torbay. Such early business acumen indicates that the splendid dignity of the Abbey – which can only be guessed at when visited today – stemmed from monastic scheming as much as dreaming.

One line of business in particular proved very lucrative in enriching the Abbey with very little cost to the monks in material terms. This was the selling of masses and prayers for the benefit of wealthy nobles and aristocrats to ensure succour and relief for their souls in the afterlife.

According to the religious dogma of Purgatory that gained currency from the 12th century, those not eternally damned could be imprisoned in a halfway house between Heaven and Hell. Fortunately, this might only be a temporary incarceration, for by way of dedicated prayers it was possible for a kind of early release to be obtained to accelerate entry into Heaven. There was scant scriptural authority for this doctrine, but as the Bible was only available in Latin and few lay people



ABOVE: The remains of Torres Abbey today; the site now houses a museum and art gallery.

The boy in shining clothes was identified as Reginald's own soul, destined for Heaven

were literate, who was qualified to argue with the Church?

An important early subscriber to the doctrines promoted at Torre was Reginald Mohun II of Torre (1206-1258) son of Reginald Mohun the First of Torre and Alice Brewer, the sister of the original founder. To guarantee the avoidance of lengthy terms in Purgatory for himself, his ancestors and descendants, Reginald II even went so far as to found another Devonshire Abbey, at Newenham near Axminster. He was duly rewarded for his generosity when shortly before his death his confessor underwent a vision (or at least claimed to have) of “a venerable person attired in white, conducted by a boy more radiant than the Sun and vested in a robe brighter than crystal, from the baptismal font of the altar”.

From a folkloric perspective such an apparition rather fits the label of a ‘Radiant Boy’, a traditional omen seen by those who rise to great heights of power but suffer drastic falls and reversals and often violent ends (see for example the much later stories of Radiant Boys at Corby Castle in Cumbria and Knebworth House in Hertfordshire). It is difficult to know what to make of such

stories, presuming any foundation in actual experience, but connections between the apparition seen by the confessor and Radiant Boy lore was made by folklorist Theo Brown, influenced by Jungian ideas (Carl Jung identified Radiant Boys as encounters with a child archetype – see ‘The Radiant Boy and Other Child Ghosts in *Devonshire Notes & Queries*, 29, pp251-52 (1962-64) by Theo Brown; *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* v.9, pt 1 (1969) Carl Jung). But the monks proposed a more favourable interpretation, supplying a palatable spin for the dying Reginald. The boy in shining clothes was identified as Reginald's own soul, destined for Heaven. Reginald duly expired soon after, doubtless convinced that his investment was worth it. When disinterred 75 years later, his body gave off a sweet fragrance, the *odour of sanctity*, and remained uncorrupted, a sign of sainthood.

With such luminous vindications, selling prayers proved very lucrative over the next few centuries, receiving endorsement from the Church with the issue of a Papal Bull in 1343 sanctioning the practice of offering indulgences to help fund construction of St Peter's in Rome.

Torre Abbey did not prove immune from other scandals. Relations with the local people deteriorated in the 14th century when an angry mob broke in during the reign of Prior de Cotelforde and in 1390 the neighbourhood was inflamed by false rumours of Abbot William Norton murdering a reclusive canon named Simon Hastynges by beheading. These allegations reached such an intensity that the Bishop of Exeter

intervened and ordered the canon to appear in public. Hastynges was duly produced and the Bishop issued a pronouncement of excommunication against those spreading rumours. But the accusers and doubters were not placated, it then being suggested that the canon was an imposter disguised as Hastynges. Belief was strengthened by stories the following year of Simon's headless ghost galloping on a phantom horse along avenues leading up to the Abbey. Tradition avers that his ghost has appeared ever since. A curious detail is the horse on which he rides is blind.

Ultimately, the accumulation of scandals within the Catholic Church and disgust at the exploitation of the religious sentiment of the faithful drove the Reformation. Henry VIII launched the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which meant the downfall not only of Torre Abbey but all such institutions across England, in the greatest single exercise in state-backed asset stripping in 500 years, unparalleled until the privatisation of the nationalised industries in the UK after 1979. Much resistance occurred across the West Country to the forced imposition of Protestantism (including the new prayer book which was incomprehensible to those who could only understand the Cornish language or local dialects), but the looting at Torre Abbey proceeded swiftly, leaving it denuded and in ruins for half a century. One building spared the onslaught was the great tithe barn and store that survived intact, and still stands south-west of the original Abbey complex.

This barn was later to become notorious



for its infamous role as an internment centre in 1588 for prisoners from a captured Spanish warship, generating the best known of Torre's ghosts. Tensions between Catholicism and Protestantism had escalated on the international level, with Philip II of Spain launching the Armada. An early casualty was the prize Spanish flagship *Neustra Senora del Rosario*, laden with treasure, which floundered after losing its mast in a collision. Surrendering to Sir Francis Drake, the vessel was towed into Torbay and its 397 mariners and soldiers taken ashore and crammed into the barn. No human rights applied and crewmembers died in droves from sickness and starvation within its thick grey walls.

A poignant and romantic story claims that really there were only 396 men aboard, for one crewmember was secretly a woman who concealed her sex to join the fateful voyage. She was the devoted wife of a lieutenant and, unwilling to be separated from her husband, she followed him to the wars in disguise. Accounts differ as to whether she passed herself off as a nun

being transported to aid in the re-conversion of England, or was simply disguised as a common sailor. Captured alongside her husband and the crew, she was stricken with grief when he predeceased her, before succumbing herself. On moonlit nights her ghost wanders outside along King's Drive, wearing a mantilla or hood; Peter Underwood records motorists glimpsing her shrouded figure in their headlights in nearby avenues in his *The A-Z of British Ghosts* (1992). But local historian Deryck Seymour, author of

Torre Abbey (1977) and *The Ghosts of Torbay* (1990), admits never tracing any actual witnesses.

The portrait of an unknown Spanish lady from the 15th century today displayed in the art collection at Torre Abbey has possibly contributed to her legend. The Spanish Lady of Torre Abbey fits the motif of the hooded female phantom (typically a White or Grey Lady) who has suffered trauma or wrong. Her apparition is a rare example of a ghost with Spanish origins in the British Isles; another is the Green Lady of Thorpe Hall, Lincolnshire, seen by occult writer Paul Huson as a child during World War II (see his 1977 book, *How To Test and Develop Your ESP*). Her proximity to the sea and distraught wandering is reminiscent of the Hispanic 'Llorona' much feared in coastal districts across Latin America (see **FT351:30-31, 373:49, 377:77**).

In the 19th century, locals believed that the spirits of sailors who starved returned on certain unspecified but auspicious nights (presumably the anniversary of their capture, Hallowe'en and Christmas Eve). Memory of the slow massacre within the barn endures in its name, the building being known ever afterwards as 'the Spanish Barn'. It is now used for weddings and concerts.

Ten years afterwards, in 1598, the politician Thomas Ridgeway (1566-1631) began a conversion of the Abbey for domestic usage and "re-edified those almost decayed cells to a newer and better form". Ridgeway served as vice-treasurer to Parliament, but was to be financially ruined himself when he was surcharged for deficits in official funds under his control. The next purchaser of Torre Abbey also met with disaster. This was Sir John Stawell who, like many West Country landowners in the Civil War, backed the losing side in staying loyal to Charles I. Stawell remained obstinate throughout the Commonwealth with the result that he was imprisoned and his lands forfeited. Eventually released at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, he sought to regain his wealth and influence.



ABOVE: The Spanish flagship, *Nuestra Senora del Rosario*, is towed into Torbay. **TOP:** The captured crew members were imprisoned in Torre's great tithe barn, where they died of starvation.



GHOSTWATCH

He became MP for Somerset but died early the following year. However, his shade does not haunt Torre but Avebury Manor House in Wiltshire, seen looking out from a window and weeping.

The fates of Ridgeway and Stawell might be taken as bolstering the longstanding belief that those who turned religious buildings seized at the Reformation into private houses were doomed to decline. But the third person to acquire the Abbey was Sir George Cary, whose family and descendants managed to hold the property for nearly 300 years, despite great risk to themselves in their early years. Whilst outwardly loyal to the Protestant crown, they remained secret Catholics, or recusants, concealing their faith in the face of harsh penalties and civil disqualifications. Laws enacted from 1593 laid the basis for persecution lasting for decades, times chillingly depicted in the novel *Havoc, in its Third Year* (2004) by Ronan Bennett. During the 1670s, the intensity of anti-Catholic sentiment increased owing to the pro-French policies of Charles II's government and belief in Popish plots against the throne. This forced the priests ministering to the Cary family to disguise and conceal themselves. It is easy to imagine how feelings of fear and tension within the household, together with fleeting glimpses of mysterious and furtive robed figures within the building, might build stories of a haunting; as Roger Clarke says in *The Natural History of Ghosts* (2012): "By vanishing into the wainscots, these clerics were, in a sense, well on the way to becoming ghosts".

Perhaps it was echoes of this clandestine worship that lay behind the manifestations reported in 1968 by Mr Lee, the then Curator of Torre Abbey, and his wife, who heard unexplained footsteps around the Abbot's Tower.

The harsh sanctions relaxed in later decades, and in the mid-18th century the Cary family flourished. One particular Lady Cary (c.1770) was a great socialite, often seen out in her carriage. After her death she continued her social rounds in a glowing spectral coach, and in the 1870s two young women spotted a brilliantly lit coach containing Lady Cary crossing the park. As they approached the breathtaking apparition, it vanished away. By the mid-19th century, Torre Abbey was considered a haunted place and phantom coaches enjoyed a vogue in the late 19th century. Many are recorded in the West Country and whilst most stories are folkloric, a handful of potentially credible accounts of phantom carriages were logged by early psychical researchers (see *Collective cases in Phantasms of the Living* (1886) vol.II, Edmund Gurney et al) so it is possible this may have been a genuine sighting.



But in turn the fortunes of the Cary family dwindled, their collapse accelerated by World War I, which claimed the lives of heirs to the estate and crippled the surviving family with death duties. This led to the house being acquired by Torbay Council in 1930, since when it has been transformed into an exemplary art gallery and museum. Among the 600 items held and exhibited, the spiritual element is well represented with work by William Blake and examples of mystical art by Edward Burne-Jones, who left the Church to take up painting, specialising in depicting pallid and ethereal angels, reminiscent of divine beings portrayed in mediæval illuminated manuscripts.

Now in the 21st century the religious passions and upheavals that shaped the history of Torre Abbey have cooled. But belief in ghosts persists, the Abbey being seen as the most haunted house in Torquay, helping earn the town the accolade of 'the most haunted place in Britain' in 2015 (see 'Revealed: The towns where things really go bump in the night' *Daily Mail*, 15 Mar 2015).

Concerning the evolution of ghost belief in Devon, Theo Brown wrote: "The sudden cessation of requiem Masses and of a belief in purgatory left a terrifying void in men's minds. Where were their dead?" ('Some Examples of Post-Reformation Folklore in Devon', *Folklore* (1961) vol.72, no.2 pp.388-399). Vivid and glowing as the accumulated spectres of Torre may be in tradition, the only first-hand reports concern much lower-level activity such as footsteps. Currently, many of the staff at Torre do not seem enthusiastic about discussing even

LEFT: A 'Radiant Boy' appears to Lord Castlereagh in an Irish castle.

these, though perhaps understandably since they are the ones working in the rambling building and who have to walk the ancient cloisters and corridors after hours, including during the darkness of winter.

Some enquirers may consider tradition indicates a host of invisible ghosts should walk at Torre, whilst others may take the view that ghostly manifestations arising from different epochs combine through time, coalescing into a single haunting (an idea advanced by parapsychologist Alex Tanous (see his posthumous *Conversations with Ghosts* (2013) edited by Callum Cooper). Either way, Theo Brown's question remains a valid one.

Perhaps there is something in the belief that manifestations wind down in time, awaiting a suitable trigger to revive them. An account by Deryck Seymour, who steeped himself in the history of the building, might suggest this. On finishing a discussion on ghosts with the then curator at the top of the stairway in the Abbot's Tower on 6 May 1968, "We saw the latch of the heavy door lifted up, whilst the door swung violently open and as suddenly slammed itself in our faces. This was about dusk on a calm, still evening with not a breath of wind. No one could have come up the flight of stairs and then got away again... Yet we distinctly saw the latch move". Seymour had just been speaking of Prior de Cotelforde and expressing his wish of being able to see the Abbey in former times.

Interestingly, similar strange door-opening incidents were reported in York seven years later on 8 February 1974, when Peter Underwood was presenting a lecture entitled a 'Talk and Discussion on Ghosts' in a room known as 'the House of Laymen' at St William's College, devoted to the ghosts of the city (see *Ghostwatch*, **FT364:18**).

Such minor incidents, trivial in themselves, are frequently reported in haunted properties, often leading to the reaction of "Was it something I said?" But could simply by speaking sympathetically of a historic personality, "Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath" (to quote from Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*).

The apparent insignificance of such moments leads them typically to be dismissed, forgotten or simply labelled as 'Just One of Those Things'. Yet it is these curious minor happenings that occur seemingly on cue when discussions turn to ghosts that have helped foster and sustain ghost beliefs in modern times. Who knows, perhaps blowing on the embers of the ghostlore of Torre Abbey may yet achieve the return of some of its shades...

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SURVIVING THE WILDERNESS | Friendly bears and talking plants save those who stray off the beaten track

Craven County Sheriff's Office



US Fish and Wildlife Service

ABOVE LEFT: Three-year-old Casey Hathaway visits the Craven County Sheriff's Office following his rescue after two nights alone in the freezing cold forest.

ABOVE RIGHT: Black bears are a common sight in North Carolina, but could one really have looked after Casey while he was lost in the woods as the boy claimed?

BEAR IN MIND

A three-year-old boy who survived two nights alone in a heavily wooded area of North Carolina in freezing conditions told police and family he was helped out by a friendly bear that was with him the whole time. Rescuers responding to reports of a baby crying found Casey Hathaway tangled up in thorny bushes, cold and soaked but safe on the night of 24 January. He had gone missing in conditions so bad the subsequent search had to be called off. Craven county sheriff Chip Hughes said Casey "did say that he had a friend in the woods that was a bear that was with him". The claim was repeated by the boy's aunt Breanna Hathaway. "He said he hung out with a bear for two days," Hathaway wrote in a Facebook post. "God sent him a friend to keep him safe. God is a good God. Miracles do happen." It's true that North Carolina is home to plenty of black bears.

Hughes said the boy had been playing with two other children in his grandmother's backyard in Ernul on 22 January, but did not come inside with them. Below freezing weather conditions and concerns Casey wasn't dressed for the cold sparked a search that involved helicopters, drones, dogs and divers, as well as hundreds

MISSING

CASEY HATHAWAY - ERNUL, NC

Casey Hathaway, age 3, was reported missing from his grandmother's home on Toler Rd. in Ernul, NC around 1:45 p.m. on Tuesday, January 22, 2019. Casey was outside playing in the yard with two other children and was discovered missing when the other children came inside and Casey was nowhere to be found. They searched the rural, wooded area for 45 minutes and called the police when Casey couldn't be located. He is 3 ft tall, with strawberry blonde hair and was last seen wearing a blue coat and dark colored pants.

of volunteers. By 24 January the wind and rain had become so bad authorities urged volunteers to stay away. "He's a survivor," said Hughes, pointing out that rescuers had to wade through waist-high water to reach the boy, who stands at 2ft 2in (66cm). Casey escaped with just a few scrapes and simply wanted some water and his mother, he said.

This tale of *Jungle Book*-style inter-species friendship was probably the product of Casey's imagination, according to Chris

"He said he had a friend in the woods... a bear was with him"

Servheen, a bear researcher at the University of Montana. "I've never known such a thing to happen, bears don't do that," he said. "Wild bears aren't friends

with people." With a sense of smell around seven times stronger than a bloodhound's, a bear would have smelled Casey long before seeing him and would most likely have then left the scene. "Bears are by and large afraid of people no matter how big the person is," Servheen said. "Bears that move towards people don't survive long, so they get selected out. The only reason it would go near the child would be to be predatory, although black bears are very rarely predatory of humans and obviously that didn't happen here." [AP] theguardian.com, 28 Jan 2019.

• However, pace Servheen, a few news reports do suggest that, given the right conditions, bears will take care of human infants. In 1971, five-year-old Goranka Cuculic got lost in the forest near her home village of Vranje in Yugoslavia. Three days later she was found by a farmer and related how she had met a bear and two cubs. The bear licked her face, and she played with the cubs and snuggled up to them at night in a cave [FT3:4]. In October 2001, a 16-month-old toddler went missing in Iran and was found in a bears' den three days later, safe and well. It was thought that the baby had been breast-fed by a mother bear. [FT155:8.] Sir James Frazer



mentions a girl who was said to have been nursed by a bear. Coolies from the tea gardens found her in a forest in Jalpaigori in 1892, sitting beside a huge bear den. Aged two or three, she walked on all fours and bit and scratched, but was gradually taught to walk upright and wear clothes, although she never learned to speak. [Sir James Frazer ed: *Fasti of Ovid*, 1929, quoting *North Indian Notes and Queries*, Mar 1893.] For further historical examples of care bears, see 'Wild Things' by Paul Sieveking, **FT161:38**.

GUIDED BY VOICES

On 25 March 2018, Katherine Brewster, 27, from Seaford, East Sussex, left a mediation retreat in Brazil, walked barefoot into dense forest, wearing only a T-shirt and shorts. It was five days before she was found sheltering near a waterfall by two local men. She was in a very hard-to-access area – very steep terrain with no roads. The forest teemed with venomous insects, deadly snakes and jaguars. She had left all her belongings behind, including her cell phone, and had hidden her passport and credit cards.

She had been staying with a family in the small eco-village of Dom Jose near Alpestre in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state. "We are a community of environmentalists," said Neimar Marcos, 35, who co-founded UniPermacultura, a centre for bio-construction and alternative living with his brother Clairton. The community is largely vegetarian and alcohol and drugs are prohibited.

Following her rescue, Brewster said that she had been receiving divine messages for three months prior to her disappearance. The divine voice told her to prepare for a trek into the wilderness, but did not tell her when that trek would be until the day of her disappearance. Interested in wilderness survival and increasing her connection with nature, she was intrigued by Rupert Sheldrake's concept of the morphogenetic field (see **FT286:38-40**). "I'd researched a lot about the morphogenetic field, how consciousness within form connects everything," she

said. "We have access to the whole Universe, all we need to do is to detach ourselves from the material. We are thus the intrinsic consciousness of the Universe. I've been preparing for this experience for a month. I learned how to [be] nourished by the Sun and not by food, and for 30 days I had managed to live without eating anything."

The divine voice told her to keep moving, and she covered about six miles (10km). She was found covered in scratches and insect bites. She said that she allowed mosquitoes, wasps, and ants to bite and sting her: "I let myself be bitten, so I could



feel the pain and learn how to not suffer." She claimed to have survived on wild plants and used herbs to treat wounds. "The plants were taking to me, telling me which ones I could eat, which ones I could make tea with, or to heal a wound with. The messages would come in words. It was more like having a conversation with the plants."

This sounds like shamanic accounts of ayahuasca ceremonies and the secrets of Amazonian tribal medicine. Brewster had been living in Brazil for two years, and spent time in Florianópolis, close to the Amazon, where ayahuasca ceremonies do happen – so it's possible that she experienced such a ceremony at some point. Perhaps the spirit of the forest, whom shamans allegedly commune with, reached out to her without chemical aid; or perhaps it was all a fantasy... *theguardian.com*, 29 Mar; *BBC News*, 30 Mar; *dailymail.co.uk*, Sun, *D.Mirror*, 31 Mar; *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 4 April 2018.

A DIET OF MOTHS

Yoga instructor Amanda Eller, 35, spent 17 days wondering the Makawao Forest Reserve on the Hawaiian island of Maui. She became lost after sitting down to meditate and getting disoriented during what was meant to be a three-mile hike, "not a spiritual journey". Speaking on 25 May, a day after she was spotted by a search helicopter hired by her frantic parents, she said from her hospital bed: "I wanted to give up, but the only option I had was life or death. I heard this voice that said, 'If you want to live, keep going'." After three days' trekking in an area inhabited by wild boar, she fell 20ft (6m) into a deep ravine and fractured her leg. Weak and injured, she began to crawl. She survived on wild berries and a few moths. She tried to catch some crayfish, but was "not very successful". One night, she took shelter in a boar's den, covering herself with leaves and mud to keep warm. She was eventually spotted four miles away from the original search area. *D.Telegraph*, 27 May 2019.



TOP: Katherine Brewster became lost in dense forest, where she received instructions from divine voices and talking plants.

ABOVE: Yoga instructor Amanda Eller is rescued and put through to her parents by phone after her 17-day ordeal in the forest.

JAVIER CANTELOPS



KARL SHUKER welcomes an unexpected albino and two monstrously good new museums

THE WORLD'S FIRST ALL-WHITE PANDA

An all-white, pink-eyed (and therefore true albino) giant panda – the first ever recorded by scientists – was recently sighted and photographed in China's Sichuan Wolong National Nature Reserve, as confirmed by the Reserve's official press release on 25 May 2019 of photos depicting this very striking, unexpected animal. Aged one to two years, it was snapped by an infrared trigger camera that had been installed last December in its habitat at an altitude of about 2,000m (6,560ft). It could be argued that the occurrence of this freak specimen, whose abnormal coloration is due to the expression of a recessive mutant gene allele, is an indication of inbreeding within its typically black-and-white species' restricted wild population. However, some such mutations can arise spontaneously, irrespective of population size or range. In fact,



bearing in mind the relatively small total wild population, if this albino were truly due to inbreeding one might expect to see more of these mutants by now. Yet only one has ever been recorded, which suggests that it did indeed arise via

spontaneous mutation. www.globaltimes.cn/content/1151519.shtml 25 May 2019; www.cbsnews.com/news/first-ever-documented-photos-all-white-albino-giant-panda-revealed/ 28 May 2019.



FROM ICELAND'S SEA MONSTER MUSEUM...

Iceland has a very long, extensive history of sea monsters and sightings of such cryptids, so it was only a matter of time before they became the subject of a major exhibition. In fact, an entire museum devoted to sea monsters has recently been opened in Iceland. Officially known as the Icelandic Sea Monster Museum, it is based in the village of Bildudalur, on the shores of Arnarfjörður Fjord. The second longest fjord in the Westfjords, this is a very sizeable watery expanse popularly claimed to be the most prolific centre of Icelandic aquatic monster activity. And now, from 15 May

to 15 September 2019, the museum is hosting an extensive interactive exhibition in which visitors can not only learn via multimedia presentations about classic sightings of and alleged encounters with a range of different Icelandic sea monsters, they can also see all manner of relevant artefacts and relics. <https://icelandnaturally.com/article/plan-your-trip-icelandic-sea-monster-museum/> 16 May 2019.

...TO THE YOKAI MUSEUM OF JAPAN

Another island country with a lengthy history of monsters is Japan, whose vast array of mythological terrors are

known collectively as yokai, and are represented in Japan's major cities by many eye-catching statues and other monuments. Now, their first dedicated museum adds significantly to this representation. Officially opening on 26 April 2019 in the city of Miyoshi in Hiroshima Prefecture, it is known formally as the Yumoto Koichi Memorial Japan Yokai Museum, or more informally as the Miyoshi Mononoke Museum. It came into existence following the generous donation in 2016 by Koichi Yumoto, a 68-year-old ethnologist and yokai researcher in Tokyo, of some 5,000 items from his personal collection, of which almost 200 are presently on display. www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2019/04/26/entertainment-news/first-museum-dedicated-japanese-folklore-monsters-opens-near-hiroshima/#.X03JJ_57m00 26 April 2019.





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A NOSE FOR TROUBLE

Cats, dogs, horses and even babies save lives by sniffing out illnesses, infections and diseases

MEDICAL DETECTION DOGS



ALHANNA BUTLER / TWITTER

ABOVE LEFT: A Medical Detection Dog sniffs out malaria from a foot odour sample. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Keola seemed to know that pregnant owner Alhanna Butler was suffering from a serious kidney infection; the American Akita dog has since bonded with Ms Butler's son, Lincoln.

- A canny cat saved the life of his owner by keeping her awake all night when he sensed something was amiss. Charlotte Dixon had gone to bed early as she felt confused and shaky, but Theo kept pawing at her face, sitting on her head, and meowing loudly every time she closed her eyes. The next day she felt worse and was rushed to Worcester Royal Hospital where she was diagnosed with a life-threatening blood clot that had travelled to her pelvis. A paramedic told her it was a good job she hadn't gone to sleep because she probably wouldn't have woken up. After undergoing surgery she was making a good recovery at home.

Last August, Theo was crowned National Cat of the Year, but sadly the eight-year-old cat had died a week earlier. Miss Dixon, 39, from Reddich in Worcestershire, picked up the trophy on his behalf during a ceremony at The Savoy in London. *D.Mirror*, 19 June; *D.Mail*, 4 Aug 2018.

- With their keen sense of smell, dogs can detect a range of diseases including diabetes and breast cancer, and anticipate epileptic fits [see FT339:22-23]. A study shows they can be trained to sniff out malaria. Researchers gave nylon socks to



CATS PROTECTOIN / WWW.CATS.ORG.UK

ABOVE: Life-saver (and subsequently 2018 Cat of the Year) Theo alerted owner Charlotte Dixon to a dangerous blood clot.

239: HOT & COLD RUNNING FOOD



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

You must never put hot food in the fridge. If you do, manifold tragedies shall befall thee, including (but not limited to) the fridge's interior reaching a temperature at which its contents are no longer safely refrigerated, and the fridge itself breaking down.

The "truth"

You should always put hot food in the fridge, rather than leaving it on the kitchen counter to cool down. All food safety authorities agree that cooked food that isn't going to be eaten immediately needs to be refrigerated or frozen within two hours. After two hours at room temperature, bacteria that cause food poisoning can reach dangerous levels. (In very hot conditions, this safe period is reduced to one hour). A fridge that's working properly shouldn't struggle to chill hot food, provided it's not overcrowded, so that cold air can circulate. The food should be covered, because evaporation can interfere with the fridge's operation, and large pots of food should be divided into smaller containers so that they will chill faster.

Sources

www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/fsis-content/internet/main/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/refrigeration-and-food-safety/ct_index; www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/FoodSafety/Myths.

Disclaimer

FT's circulation department gets very annoyed when we poison our readers, so please don't rely on our advice on this matter. And if you can explain why authorities differ on the question of whether hot food can damage a fridge, which sounds like something easily established by experiment, please write in.

Mythchaser

Can it be true, a reader writes, that there is no such thing as a species? Or at least, that there is currently no generally accepted definition of the concept, following the abandonment of the one about interbreeding that we were taught at school? Is "species" a myth?



600 children in the Gambia in West Africa, which they wore overnight. The children were also given blood tests to see if they had malaria. The socks – or rather 175 pairs, 30 of which were malaria-positive – were then sent to the Medical Detection Dogs charity in Milton Keynes, where animals can already diagnose prostate cancer. The dogs – trained to stand still if they detect malaria, and keep walking if not – correctly identified 70 per cent of those with the disease. Unlike humans, they can smell sweet fruity chemicals linked to malaria even at minuscule concentrations.

The results could mean the first speedy non-invasive test for malaria in people who have yet to show signs of fever – which could save millions of lives worldwide. Dogs could achieve even greater accuracy in person, since for the study they merely sniffed socks that had been frozen for several months. The work could see sniffer dogs at airports detecting malaria as well as drugs. There were an estimated 216 million malaria cases in 2016, resulting in an estimated 445,000 deaths. Around 90 per cent of cases are in sub-Saharan Africa. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, D.Mirror, 30 Oct 2018.*

- At 16 weeks of pregnancy, Alhanna Butler, 24, from Doncaster, experienced sickness and intense backache. Doctors assured her such symptoms were a normal part of pregnancy but Keola, a four-year-old American Akita dog, started following her, pawing at her, and howling if she left the house. After two weeks, Ms Butler felt very ill and knew something was seriously wrong when Keola sat down in front of her, stared her in the face and would not move. "I had a gut feeling she was trying to tell me something," she said, "so I went to hospital and said I needed a doctor." She collapsed while waiting in a hospital corridor and woke up in intensive care, where she spent three weeks being treated for an aggressive double kidney infection that had spread to her bloodstream. Doctors said that had she waited another day to come in, it is

unlikely she or her unborn son, Lincoln (who is now a healthy three-year-old) would have survived.

Keola has been shortlisted for pet care company Drontal's Trusted Companion award. The irony was that Ms Butler and her partner had been advised to get rid of Keola when she found out she was pregnant in case the pet didn't get on with their child. "She saved both of us and now she is best friends with my son, she is like his guardian angel," said Ms Butler. *D. Express, 3 Nov 2018.*

- Helen Mason was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011 after her horse repeatedly nudged her on the chest [FT339:23]. A similar case has now been reported. Clare Taylor Reeves, 43, a Pilates teacher and mother of two, was constantly butted in her shoulder by her eight-year-old horse, Frankie, which led her to schedule an appointment with her GP and the discovery of a lump between her chest and shoulder. This was identified as a grade-three negative breast cancer, which required immediate surgery. She was told the cancer hadn't spread to her lymph nodes, but further tests revealed she had triple negative breast cancer and had to endure six months of chemotherapy. She later had a double mastectomy. *D.Telegraph, 4 Feb 2019.*

- Babies, too, can sniff out breast cancer, apparently. When young Matilda refused to suckle her left breast, her mother Claire Granville, 40, went to her GP and in April 2018 a scan found a 4in (10cm) lump behind her left nipple. "It was as though she had literally sniffed it out and refused to go near it," said Ms Granville. "She was fine feeding from my right breast, it was the left one she wouldn't go near. She would turn her head away as soon as I held her near. Because I was able to get treatment swiftly, it meant it was successful. Matilda has ended up saving my life." Ms Granville, a nurse who lives in Hull with her partner and three children, had a mastectomy and needed chemo and radiotherapy, but got the all-clear in January 2019. *D.Mirror, 2 Feb 2019.*

NECROLOG

This month, we bid farewell to New Orleans's musical ambassador of Vodou and mark the passing of a vociferous proponent of the extraterrestrial hypothesis



DR JOHN

Dr John died of a heart attack just as the Sun was coming up. Born Malcolm John Rebennack Jr., he was raised Roman Catholic, but growing up in New Orleans's Third Ward district meant an exposure to Vodou. As he related to NPR interviewer Terry Gross in 1986: "When I was coming up, it was like everybody I know... whether it was my grandmother or my grandfather, everybody did certain little gris-gris things. It was like the herbal remedies we took as a kid was strictly gris-gris things. And I don't think people, they look at spells and stuff, but that's a side of something, and it's a very small part of what gris-gris is about in Louisiana. And it's just part of the culture."

Rebennack was performing with Professor Longhair at the age of 13. As a young man, he played guitar until he got into a backstage scuffle in Jackson, Mississippi, in which his finger was shot off and had to be sewn back on; after that, he switched to piano. He developed a heroin habit, which he would not shake until 1989, and did a stint in prison, either for burglary or drugs, depending on which account you read. He went on to Los Angeles to be a backing musician for Aretha Franklin, Phil Spector, and Sonny and Cher, but it was a brief appearance on *Freak Out!* by Frank Zappa and

the Mothers of Invention that perhaps hinted at the idiosyncrasy to come.

He was billed as "Dr John, the Night Tripper" for his 1968 debut album, *Gris-Gris*. One song, "I Walk on

Guided Splinters", came from the viewpoint of a zombie: "Je suis the Grand Zombi/My yellow belt of choison/Ain't afraid of no tomcat/Fill my brains with poison". Reverential or not, Dr John's appropriation of Vodou arrived at a time when youth interest in the occult was creeping into the music scene. Rebennack took his name from John Mantanee, patron saint of male Vodou practitioners, commonly referred to as 'Dr John'. Lafcadio Hearn called Mantanee, who died in 1924, "The Last of the Voodooos", but Rebennack was determined to keep the legend alive. He created a stage act with a New Orleans vibe and a touch of Vodou ceremony, wearing feather boas and adorning his piano with a skull. In addition to his walking stick, he was known to carry a mojo bag made from a kangaroo's scrotum, while protective amulets were sold as merchandise at his shows. He later admitted that his conception was more show business concept than serious mythology: "I got all these people from New Orleans who were real familiar with that kind of music. And we did the album, and the show was geared to the snake dancers and all the regular voodoo shows of New Orleans... and when I first presented it, it was a little too authentic for the labels. They weren't quite ready for a guy biting a chicken's head

off and stuff... we modified the show... to a more showbiz style and took it on the road".

Dr John's use of Vodou was notable in that he proudly displayed the accoutrements of the religion as signifiers of New Orleans's heritage, rather than a frightening superstition. He said that he'd started a Vodou church, but that he'd done so in order to get the state of Louisiana to recognise Vodou as a legitimate religion: "Well, what I actually did was legalise it. I chartered it so that the reverend mothers in New Orleans would not be busted for fortune telling, for doing spells and whatever they did prior to me having got a charter with the state of Louisiana."

Dr John became known to the general public for his funky 1973 hit "Right Place, Wrong Time". By this time the music had eased off on the spookiness and cranked up the funk. His image became less menacing over the years, and he was part of the inspiration for the Muppets character "Dr Teeth". His 2001 album *Creole Moon* added to the strange musical subgenre of songs dictated from the Other Side. According to Dr John, he'd gotten the waltz tune "Georgianna" from his father, long dead at the time. He told James McNair: "There's times I've been sat on his grave and heard him hummin' stuff without seeing him, but on this occasion, he was sitting close as you are now. He looked like when he was young, and he was singing that exact melody. I recorded it on my tape recorder and wrote the words later." When the same interviewer asked if Vodou still impacted his life, the reply indicated respect but not immersion: "I'll still visit Marie Laveau's tomb, but I won't put no Xs on it. I respect her spirit, but the Great Spirit is bigger than any saint, and I don't like to go to the Vice-President if I can find The President."

In later years, Dr John became known as an interpreter of New Orleans standards and went on to win Grammy Awards and be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2011. He cancelled tour dates in 2017 and was not seen again in public. Louisiana governor John Bel Edwards released a statement calling the late singer "a true Louisiana legend". Asked what made Dr John special, singer Irma Thomas replied: "He was just a mystical person."

Malcolm John Rebennack Jr., stage name "Dr John", musician and Vodou ambassador, born New Orleans, 20 Nov 1941; died New Orleans, 6 June 2019, aged 77.

Brett Taylor

STANTON T FRIEDMAN

Stanton Friedman may have been the most publicly visible UFO advocate in North America when he died this spring. A tireless lecturer and author, he favoured a hardcore version of the extraterrestrial hypothesis. He further held that the US government has concealed proof of an alien presence. First proposed by Donald Keyhoe at the dawn of the UFO debate, in time this idea found its most fiery proponent in Friedman, who called himself the "Flying Saucer Physicist". He preferred "flying saucers" to "UFOs" because in his mind the flying objects were *not* unidentified.

As the earliest ufological investigator of what, by 1980, was being called the Roswell incident, Friedman extended the argument to encompass recovered bodies and hardware, even though Keyhoe himself had been sceptical of such allegations. Friedman credited and publicised other UFO crash/retrieval stories, among them one set in Aztec, New Mexico, and associated with Frank Scully's 1950 best-seller *Behind the Flying Saucers*, thought by other observers to have its origins in



an oil swindle.

Friedman embraced the much-disputed MJ-12 document, allegedly a leaked 1952 memo from a top-secret, high-level group overseeing custody of ET hardware. After some initial curiosity most of his colleagues came to reject the item as a forgery created in the 1980s. Characteristically, however, Friedman refused to back down, going on to write two editions of *Top Secret/Majic* (1996, 1997) in defence of MJ-12's historical authenticity.

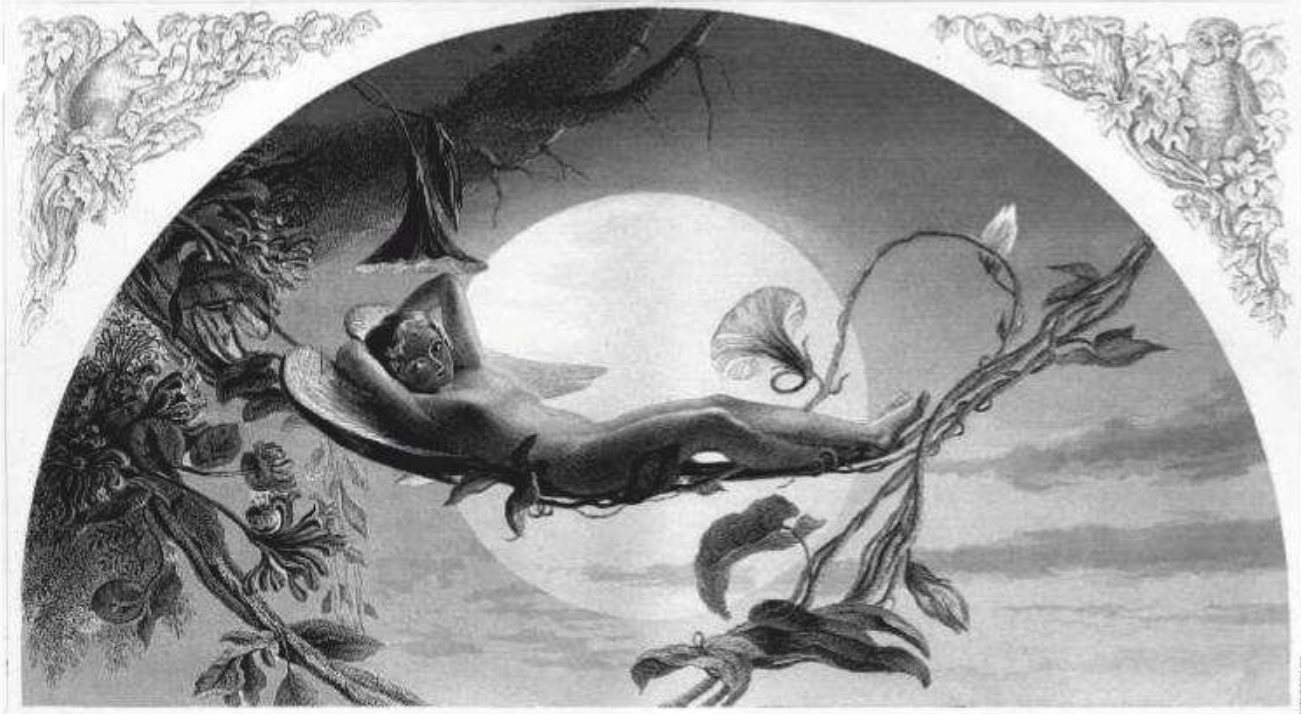
Like archdebunker Philip J Klass, with whom he often noisily crossed swords, Friedman never conceded error or changed his mind about much of anything. The joke ran that while the two men held opposite views of UFOs, they shared a single personality. No one – or at least no one who knew him – ever doubted Friedman's sincerity and courage, however. He spoke at hundreds of colleges and other public forums, and was a mainstay at popular UFO conventions. He seemed to have no other personal interest.

Born in New Jersey, he attended Rutgers University and the University of Chicago. From the latter he attained a bachelor's and a master's degree in physics. While working as a nuclear scientist in private industry in 1958, he read Edward Ruppelt's influential *Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. Enthralled, he eventually left mainstream employment to pursue the subject professionally. By 1970, he had become an itinerant spokesman for UFOs.

Notwithstanding an announcement of his retirement in March 2018, Friedman died at the Toronto airport 14 months later on his way home to Fredericton, New Brunswick, from a UFO-related engagement in Ohio. It is unlikely that the world will see the likes of Stan Friedman ever again.

Stanton Terry Friedman, physicist and ufologist, born Elizabeth, New Jersey, 29 July 1934; died Toronto, Ontario, 13 May 2019, aged 84.

Jerome Clark



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

BOGGART OUTREACH

It is not an everyday question, but, reader, does your gran, your great aunt or the retired chap who lives next door know something about boggarts?

Let me explain why I ask. I'm presently finishing a book on boggarts, the supernatural monsters that enlivened existence through much of the Midlands and northern England in the 19th century (see **FT129:52, 133:51, 136:53, 139:50, 326:25**). The boggart was well documented in our books and newspapers from about 1840 to 1914. I've managed to gather together, over the last few years, several hundred thousand words on the subject. But neither folklorists nor forteans proved interested in boggarts after the Great War. Indeed, the next decades are a boggart black hole. We know, thanks to very occasional references, that in the 1930s and 1940s, some still talked of boggarts and that kids were still sent petrified to bed with the threat that "the boggart will get you!" There are even some places where in the 1950s and 1960s people confessed to boggart fear. Then it was all over; the next we hear of the boggart is its appearance in Katharine Briggs's fairy dictionary, from where it made its way into Susan Cooper's books, the *Spiderwick Chronicles* and the Harry Potter universe: the fantasy boggart had been created. What this means is that

there are a number of people walking around today, born between 1915 and say 1960, who grew up with boggarts: not JK Rowling's comic turn, but the terrifying original.

I'm ashamed to say that I didn't, at first, recognise how important these last boggarted folk were. But I've now had two striking instances where informants alive today have

been able to fill gaps in my records: in one case, someone explained why boggart roads are bent; in another, why you should avoid boggart fields. I am now looking to gather together a few dozen witnesses from this last generation of boggart believers and ask them some modest questions. For me it is already incredibly valuable to know that the word 'boggart' was used by neighbours in a given year in a given town or city. If the informant can only tell me that, I'd

be very grateful. If he or she

has experiences or stories or other insights, all the better. I can conduct the interview by email, by phone, by letter... I can do so through an intermediary if necessary and anonymity is, I hope it goes without saying, assured. I've deliberately kept details sparse about boggarts in this column so as not to create bias in the results. But my colleague Lucy Evans turned up in her studies, a genuinely creepy 19th-century boggart picture, a copy of which I'll be very glad to pass on as a thank you. Please make contact at: sycourses@yahoo.com.

SOME KIDS
WERE STILL SENT
PETRIFIED TO
BED WITH THE
THREAT THAT
"THE BOGGART
WILL GET YOU!"



So, farewell then, Stanton T Friedman

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

Much might be said about the recently deceased Stan Friedman [you'll find his obituary on p28], and many have, most of it mysteriously complimentary comment. It's a mark of how odd is the world of ufology that it's possible for someone to have an enormous impact, be wrong about just about everything he tackled, and yet garner fulsome acclaim when he falls off his twig. So, ever contrarian, I come not to praise Stan, but to bury him.

Stan, working as an uncredited researcher for Charles Berlitz and Bill Moore, more or less single-handedly re-animated the long-forgotten Roswell Incident – not, I hasten to add, because he made stuff up, but because he believed people who did, and a whole troop of them came out of their burrows for a couple of decades, to the great distraction and, when they proved to be liars, enormous embarrassment of mainstream ufology. Then Stan fell for the original, 1987-vintage MJ-12 papers, the bastard children of Roswell, and never wavered in his belief that they were the real deal, despite all sorts of proof that they were hokum. He was to his credit rather less impressed with later *soi-disant* MJ-12 fakery, but nonetheless espoused such batty ideas as that transistors were reverse-engineered from alien technology filched from the Roswell wreckage. He also had to stretch logic beyond breaking-point in fingering those he thought composed the original MJ-12 panel, particularly in accusing arch-debunker Donald Menzel of being among that crew. Then he fell for the Aztec crash legend, the underlying facts of which are, not to put too fine a point on it, non-existent. Even to make his version of Roswell work, he had to have two flying saucers bump into one another and come scrunching down in different places. Stan was forever going on about being scientific, but he never seems to have had much truck with Occam's Razor. Perhaps his biggest flaw in that respect was failing to admit that data from the Hipparcos satellite blew the Fish Model, which indicated that the aliens who supposedly abducted Betty and Barney came from Zeta Reticuli, out of the sky [see **FT225:29** for Stan's view, and **FT242:50-52** for Brett Holmann's critique]. Pestered relentlessly about this, the best he could do was say it was 'very interesting' and that he'd look into it. If he ever did, he was remarkably silent about it. Stan wasn't one to be confused by the facts if he could help it.

Nor did he seem to be aware of more abstract arguments. He never really justified his notion that aliens might exist in the first place, because (I guess) he never



ABOVE: The historic marker commemorating the 1973 Pascagoula abduction case was unveiled on 22 June.

understood – or never felt the need to understand – the contingencies involved in (a) evolution to intelligence (b) the cultural evolution of a technological society. He seemed to think these were somehow inevitable, which they are not. And he never really took on sceptical arguments, preferring to call anyone who disagreed with him a "nasty, noisy, negativist". I've always wondered what might be "positive" about believing in alien visitation, if you ignore the contactee movement, up at which Stan anyway turned his nose – which is an historiographical mistake in itself.

In person, Stan was affable, and generous with sharing material if he had it and you didn't – although later he could be publicly (and twistedly) sarcastic about your apparent ignorance. On another level he could be obnoxious, as in his threat to sue our own Jenny Randles for libel. He maintained that she had been defamatory in describing some of his ufological assertions as "outrageous tripe", which seems to me to be fair comment, none of which incidentally mentioned our man Stan by name. Oh, one wishes one could have seen him stand up in court and attempt to defend his bizarre beliefs in the face of a demon barrister's thumbscrew-like cross-examination, no doubt to much mirth from the pricier seats. Unfortunately, Jenny didn't have the funds to defend herself – which, one suspects, Stan and his legal advisers knew perfectly well, which in my view made the whole nasty episode worse, and less than honourable. So, Jenny was punished by unscrupulous process, not by the majesty of the law, and

coughed up to keep the bastards off her back. If you want the full skinny, the whole dismal, complicated tale is hilariously told by David Langford at <https://ansible.uk/writing/uniconze.html>. Stan Friedman's ufological faults, abundant as they were, were not much worse than those of others one could name, if one extracts his huge ego from the mix, but this one strikes me as unforgivably odious. So, RIP if you can, Stan.

AND IN OTHER NEWS...

Calvin Parker and Charles Hickson, who are not, as the younger ones among you may suppose, a couple of bluegrass fiddlers, are having their alleged 1973 abduction, while fishing in Pascagoula, Mississippi, commemorated with a nice plaque. The TTSAAS/Nimitz/etc controversy rumbles on, with almost everyone involved now disagreeing with everyone else involved, including Pentagon officials, and as with bullfighting and bearbaiting, the less said the better until something sensible comes out in the wash, which in this case it may never do. So, I may have to revert to Trappist mode on that one, for a while. Ray Santilli has popped up to say that his fake alien-abduction movie is genuine after all. Sure, and President Trump has just sold the Brooklyn Bridge to a consortium of the Israeli and Iranian governments, who will jointly collect tolls and donate the proceeds to, um, Jeremy Corbyn. Bob Lazar has emerged from his murky past and is still wittering about his stash of solid Element 115, alias muscovium, half-life 0.65 seconds, I believe. Nothing ever goes away in ufology – which is why it's all so much fun.



“Take me to your leader”

JENNY RANGLES asks whether governments would ever share their UFO secrets with the public

If an alien were to land in the UK and speak the words beloved of cartoonists for decades, they would have a bit of a problem right now. The request “take me to your leader” would probably elicit a response of “Good luck with that one, ET!”

Not so in the USA, where President Trump has made his thoughts on flying saucers crystal clear as only The Donald can. On 15 June he spoke to ABC News in response to questions about recent footage of UFOs witnessed by military fighters after guidelines created to report “unidentified aircraft intrusions”. Here is what the President said with his usual clarity:

“I think, it’s probably – I want them to think whatever they think. They do say, and I’ve seen, and I’ve read, and I’ve heard. And I did have one very brief meeting on it. But people are saying they are seeing UFOs. Do I believe it? Not particularly.”

So, the leader of the free world has strong views about possible aliens. And if you can work out what they are from the above send answers on a postcard, please. Pressed on whether he knew if alien life had been detected, he replied: “Well, I think my great pilots would know... We’re going to see. We’re watching, and you’ll be the first to know.”

But how seriously can we take President Trump’s insistence that if alien life were to be discovered we, the people, would be the first to know?

Interestingly, the first comment by a world leader on such things was made 106 years ago. To be clear, he was only a Defence Minister at the time; but Winston Churchill, who became British Prime Minister 27 years later, is probably the only person to speak publicly on the subject of UFOs twice, four decades apart. In 1913 he was forced to explain strange lights over the east coast of the UK. It was feared they might be advanced German zeppelins and Churchill gave the usual bland assurances so common in more recent similar UFO sightings. On 28 July 1952, as Prime Minister, Churchill wrote to his Secretary of State for Air following UFOs seen during a NATO exercise asking: “What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth?” His words led to the creation of Ministry of Defence investigation units – and questions that remain unresolved. Alien invaders may have been supplanted by more down-to-Earth possibilities, but the secrecy-minded nature of defence bodies the world over remains the same. We still know only what they want us to know – which means it’s reasonable to doubt what Trump would reveal



if and when he finds the “truth” about UFOs.

Ralph Noyes, who went on to head the MoD department collating UFO data, was, following his retirement, willing to talk with those of us involved in the Rendlesham Forest case and assisted in the promotion of the 1984 book *Sky Crash* by Brenda Butler, Dot Street and myself. I had many fascinating discussions with him about how UFOs were handled by defence agencies and their protocols on what to say about them. Noyes believed that, misperceptions aside, some form of energy was involved and that was key to why the MoD was interested and insisted on such secrecy. Even if UFOs turned out to be nothing stranger than a high-tech rainbow – a comparison he used – the consequences of it being exploited either defensively or offensively could completely change the balance of world power.

Noyes reminded me not long before he died that any information released to the public is only what ‘they’ want us to see – we should always ask what they do *not* want us to see, and why not. In recent years, the MoD has steadily released its UFO files – apparently everything it has, bar the odd item that went astray over the years. However, *is* it everything? We know that files on pre-1962 cases were supposedly destroyed before the 1967 UFO wave led to retention. It seems extraordinary that in the 10 years after Churchill’s memo many crucial cases were “routinely disposed of” in that purge. Noyes had been sent north in 1952 to investigate the NATO exercise sightings and was baffled. Churchill heard enough about his findings to create covert departments, and Noyes was involved in them at a high level over the next 30 years. He told me of things he saw in those files, supposedly destroyed just a decade later: these included gun-camera footage taken from RAF planes, reports into radar visual sightings at RAF bases, and encounters by experienced pilots during mid-air missions. He found it extraordinary that these would be destroyed – and so do I.

I suspect this material exists somewhere, as I have recently assessed how many cases I received from RAF aircrew, military personnel, police officers or radar operators in that decade following Churchill’s memo. These witnesses all said they submitted reports or were debriefed by intelligence staff. They assumed that when the MoD released files, theirs would be among them. But they were not. Indeed, even cases beyond the 1962 cut-off seem to have vanished, including the November 1980 close encounter in Todmorden by PC Alan Godfrey in his patrol car. A file on this was certainly created, as it was seen in 1982; nobody knows where the file is now.

So can we really share President Trump’s belief that if the truth about UFOs, be it alien or mundane, emerges then we will be the first to know? After all, two previous US presidents said the same before becoming President. In 1966, Gerald Ford told the Armed Services Committee, “I think there may be substance in some of these reports” and called for “the greatest possible enlightenment” as “we owe it to the people to establish credibility”. He derided “flippant answers” given by the military. But, of course, when he became President, the flippant answers continued. Perhaps he learned the truth: that there was nothing to it. Or perhaps the truth was that it was not the kind of thing that even presidents get to reveal. Jimmy Carter was equally forthright, even reporting a UFO sighting while Governor of Georgia. But again, when he became President there was no follow-through on his words – not even an affirmation that he had been wrong and that the investigation into his sighting had found the truth.

One of the things Ralph Noyes wrote about the UFO cover-up before his death was an extraordinary novel, *A Secret Property*, a dramatised version of his theory about the Rendlesham incident. As the title suggests, he saw unresolved cases as of scientific interest yet protected by essential secrecy because of their weaponisation potential, and he wrote knowingly of international power struggles over such material being made public. His story ends with the British PM choosing to do a Trump and reveal the secret behind UFOs. She invites British researchers from national groups like ‘UFORA’ to Wembley Stadium, where she promises to reveal all before the cameras. It does not end well.

I am not expecting an invite to such an event any time soon: explaining the secrets behind the UFO phenomenon will not be quite that simple...



116. Hoia Baci: Romania's Haunted Forest

CHRIS HILL gets his teeth sorted out by a Transylvanian dentist and then heads into the forest of Hoia Baci, where strangely contorted trees, UFOs and 'time tunnels' are proving a draw for paranormal tourism...

Mention Romania these days and you may well get an unwanted discourse on migrant labour and the iniquity of global capital. Mention Transylvania and the mood shifts to one of affection for things supernatural; Count Dracula, and the bloodthirsty denizens of Romanian folklore – *Strigoi* and *Iele*.¹ Mention the charming city of Cluj-Napoca and the standard reaction is: "Where?" That is, unless you are one of the true initiates – a devotee of good dentistry at a reasonable cost. I mean, can there be a better place to have one's teeth done than in Transylvania?

Sitting pleasantly in the north west of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca is Romania's second city and embodies the country's complex history since pre-Roman

times. The city is dominated by the Babes-Bolyai University, established in 1581, and offers an informal and relaxed social and cultural life. Located on the banks of the Someşul river and surrounded by wooded hills, the environs of the city appeal as much to residents today as they obviously did in 5800 BC, when the mysterious Starcevo-Koros-Cris culture² set down roots in the Lunga Valley, north east of Cluj-Napoca. Although an outpost of the Dacian Empire,³ it was the Roman conquest of the region under Trajan in AD 106 that marks Cluj-Napoca's entry into historical records. Undergoing a significant commercial expansion, the settlement was granted the status of a municipality by Hadrian (AD 76-138) and

became the capital of the region Dacia Porolissensis by the second century AD, when its status was changed to a *colonia*. By 274, however, the city's good fortune was eclipsed and an evacuation of Roman interests took place, ushering in a more precarious phase in the region's history.

The centuries that followed saw Transylvanian Saxons, Hungarians and ethnic Romanians stake their claims to political primacy. The late mediæval period and the region's coming under the ægis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the 16th to 18th centuries paved the way for subsequent foreign domination. The final threads of this complex tapestry – the period of Nazi control, Soviet liberation and

absolute authoritarianism under the Ceaucescu regime – give Romania's complex history a dark, spectral hue. It is this 'darkness' that feeds into the mystery of the forest, I believe, and offers the visitor easy entry into a web of myth and legend.

Parallel to Cluj-Napoca's complex history is the equally baroque fabric of legend and folklore woven into Transylvania's cloak of superstition and otherness – an alternative history, predating civil society, with its roots in the rivers, mountains and forests. And it is to the forest we will go: Hoia Baci, the forest of the shepherds, on the southern outskirts of the city. At a height of 506m (1,660ft), Hoia offers both resident and visitor fresh air and possible



ABOVE: An early 17th century engraving of Cluj-Napoca by Georg Houfnagel after a painting by Egidius van der Rye.





CHRIS HILL

ABOVE: Looking towards Hoia Baci. **BELOW:** One of the famous photos of a UFO above the forest taken by 45-year-old construction technician Emil Barnea in 1968.

enchantment. Known in UFO and parapsychological circles as a hotspot, following a UFO sighting by a local military technician in 1968, Hoia has become Romania's Roswell. So, root canals sorted and teeth buffed I decided to take a look for myself.

Interest in the forest has taken off in the last few years, largely due its promotion by knowledgeable locals Marius and Alex. Marius combines his job at the Cluj-Napoca tourist information agency with his activities as a guide, accompanying interested parties into the forest for both daytime and night-time excursions. Alex, a trained physicist, offers expertise in the many weird and wonderful episodes that characterise the forest's mythology and its links to the city's turbulent past. Through the auspices of the welcoming Tourist Office I arranged to meet Alex the following morning for a tailored excursion to the 'hotspots'. He assured me that as a physicist he approached the forest with a scientific eye, allowing speculation in only when all material reasoning had been exhausted. The sombre October clouds did little to obscure the shifting yellow and umber tones of the leaf fall as we approached the periphery of the forest. As we strolled uphill we took time to enjoy the smell of the wet earth and collect the endless rows of field mushrooms, newly risen. First impressions



Weird spatial relocations are an everyday occurrence

were very favourable indeed.

Entering the forest, we headed towards the most visited part, the central clearing, a roughly circular patch of meadow around 50m (164ft) across and to which all paths appear to lead. The forest is both easily accessible and quite small, so it's difficult to imagine that people get lost in it, let alone disappear. It is these rumours of vanishing people (usually a 'friend of a friend')

that have led to suggestions that the forest is punctuated with 'time tunnels' and that weird spatial relocations are an everyday occurrence. Alex explained that parapsychological interest in the site was down to two scientists, both Romanian, one living and one dead.

Professor of Biology Alexandru Sift (1936-1993) began to research the forest in the 1960s. His interest was in identifying areas of unusual magnetic activity and light disturbances. Sift systematically documented his research activities and compiled what was, according to Alex, a formidable archive of scientific and photographic materials, including images of UFOs, bioplasmic phenomena and disc-shaped objects the professor claimed to have witnessed throughout the 1960s. Sadly, much of this material was lost following Sift's death, the remainder being inherited by his successor, Adrian Patrut, professor of chemistry at the nearby Babes-Bolyai University. Still resident in Cluj-Napoca, Patrut is reluctant to discuss his theories regarding the forest, preferring to present his findings in his key work, *The Phenomena of the Hoia-Baci Forest* (1995) and other monographs on the subject of parapsychology.⁴ Alex told me that he had courted Patrut for quite some time before he agreed to a meeting to discuss his ideas. In a nutshell, Patrut's

initial interest in radioactive and magnetic emissions, bioplasma, UFO events and apparitions has been replaced by a more profoundly mystical discourse regarding the purpose and function of the forest. More on this later.

Meanwhile, we turned to one of the main aspects that underlie the forest's haunted, otherworldly reputation: its trees. Arboreal weirdness occurs here in many different forms, none of which has ever been fully explained and all of which work in synchrony to create a strange and slightly claustrophobic ambience. First up are trees that have been twisted along their central axis, creating a corkscrew effect, regardless of the stage of growth cycle of the tree. To date, no convincing chemical, electromagnetic or meteorological explanation has been proffered. There are also species that exhibit multiple trunks with a singular root, including intertwined trunk systems of differing species. On top of this, we find trees that have grotesque, bulbous, outgrowths decorating their trunks and fostering a perception of the forest as something primal, unfettered and distinct from the everyday; these include what has become known as the 'alien face', a parasitic growth with, in my opinion, barely discernible features. Alex was sure there was a biological explanation,

though it has yet to be found. The final anomaly came in the shape of trees whose branches, although adequately sun-blessed, eschewed their usual upward direction and grew towards the forest floor instead. Known as ‘arches’ they dominate certain areas of the forest and form what may be loosely described as tunnels. Similarly, there are other trees in which trunk growth is characterised by a movement 90 degrees to the original pitch. Neither of these growth anomalies has been adequately explained and were of great interest to Patrut, whose scientific speciality is dendrology. Alex singled out one tree in particular that Patrut believed to be inexplicable in its behaviour. When first recorded by Patrut, the tree had a branch system that exhibited unusual angles of growth and yet, to Patrut’s surprise, in more recent years it has resorted to a standard upward pattern of development. Patrut himself could find no material reason as to why, and so it remains a mystery.

I agreed with Alex that the strangeness the trees contribute to the atmosphere of the forest creates a perfect space in which to project one’s own desire for some sort of paranormal engagement, whether real

or otherwise. For example, the arched branches, to many observers, become portals to time tunnels; when compounded by tales of people who disappear and re-emerge later, they become proof positive of the supernatural nature of the forest.

Alex told me of a time when he lost all sense of direction within the forest. He became disorientated and overwhelmed, quite unable to account for such feelings in light of his knowledge of each and every path. Interestingly, tales of bewilderment and disorientation feed into Patrut’s more recent theories as to the purpose of the forest. He suggests that it acts as a type of ‘psychic battery’ through which people may engage with the unknown, willingly or otherwise. He develops his idea by theorising that a type of ‘supernatural accountancy’ might take place through the medium of bioplasma; as the forest gives up its own energy to fulfil desire, each visitor is psychically ‘taxed’. Those who have witnessed spheres of light and ball lightning are merely witnessing the balance sheet in action.

Of course, the power of a good story is in its telling and our next port of call embodied the reputation of Hoia Baci as a paranormal ‘must see’.

The central clearing (‘Poiana Rotunda’), some 50m (164ft) into the forest, is the focal point for many visitors, being the site of the 1968 UFO event documented by Emil Barnea. Often cited as the reason why no trees or vegetation grow within the clearing, the UFO theory does not find favour with my guide. He explained that poor soil conditions and bad planting practice, not extraterrestrial radiation, accounted for the meadow-like conditions. Despite its probably mundane origin, the clearing still attracts plenty of visitors. Alex had witnessed both white and black magicians engaged in rituals of cleansing and demon invocation, Christian exorcists, home-grown and otherwise, and pilgrims following a route supposedly linked to the worship of St Mary. Of course, in terms of folkloric potential, visitors of any persuasion add to the frisson the forest offers the thrill-seeker. Unsurprisingly, little evidence of UFO activity has been reported, let alone anything supernatural, compelling both Alex and myself to conclude that perhaps it is just a meadow after all. Given the number of empty vodka bottles and beer cans, I suspected that some visitors to the forest came in search of more down-to-earth experiences than UFO sightings

or visionary encounters.

It was on the perimeter of the clearing that a technician from the *Travel Channel*’s ‘*Ghost Adventures*’ team came over all peculiar as he stood by an arching tree. Reporting feelings of cosmic dread, he described being drawn into the forest as if pulled into a leafy maelstrom! Filming apparently ceased until he regained his composure. Almost on cue – as we stood within the jaws of said ‘time tunnel’ – an inexplicable wind gathered above our heads and a distinctly local rustling took place in the nearby canopy. I was impressed, and like many wanted to claim the event as a genuine forest anomaly.

Alex confessed that he had not experienced any psychic vampirism as such, but noted that he did always advise camera crews to bring extra batteries as the forest has a reputation for draining stored energy sources. Out of curiosity I checked my own camera, fully charged that very morning, to find it had dwindled in power significantly. Perhaps something was afoot after all. Research into electromagnetic field perturbations provides the main activity for many contemporary parapsychologists and physicists, and evidence has been gathered of unusual magnetic distribution



ABOVE: The trees in Hoia Baci show a wide range of apparently unexplained features, including corkscrew twisting, trunks that change direction and strange cankers.

CHRIS HILL



ABOVE: Some believe the forest is full of temporal anomalies, ‘time tunnels’ into which people disappear only to re-emerge (if at all) sometime later.

and movement across a central belt within the forest. Similarly, plenty of research focuses on acoustic and light phenomena and, in truth, it is these that many visitors identify as being supernatural.

Given the proximity of the forest to high voltage pylons and a major transport route, perhaps more rational explanations than discarnate entities and free-ranging energies are to be favoured. Natural phenomena such as ball lightning have been reported on many occasions, and indeed by my guide himself. For many Hoia Baciú devotees this sort of sighting alone is evidence that the forest is of paranormal interest. Mundanely, the refraction of car headlights and ambient lighting from the nearby conurbations could account for the lights seen within bushes and trees that appear to recede when approached. Similarly, the uncanny howling of the spirits of the dead might just be the grinding of serpentine branches against each other.

What remains of interest to me is the number of visitor-reported sightings compared to those by locals. Given that decades of research documentation have been lost it is impossible to ascertain if this was always the

There are tales of people who disappear and then return

case. Typical of the non-verifiable ‘real life’ stories are tales of people who disappear and then return after considerable time has passed, those who just disappear, the feeling of being followed, and the oft-cited sensations of anxiety and dread. However, it is true to say that such stories typify the mythos of forests and valleys worldwide, landscapes that almost demand a narrative underpinning. When I asked Alex what the locals thought, he told me that those who use the forest as a place of work and who have lived in its shadow for generations have few tales of any note. Drunken teenagers tend to be the key source of any contemporary tales, not unsurprisingly, and there has been little police intervention in the many cases of those who are missing, presumed fallen into a time tunnel. Although an ever-present folklore still clings to

Hoia Baciú, the forest appears to offer up its otherworldly delights only to a lucky (or unlucky) few. Thankfully, this does not detract from one’s enjoyment of a very beautiful locale.

After our three-hour sojourn I was satisfied that Hoia Baciú is a fantastic place to visit and one that would offer the visitor with a supernatural agenda ample opportunity for a fantastical experience; for my part, I was pleased with my singular encounter with some somewhat inexplicable tree rustling. It’s the magnetic appeal of the forest to a broad spectrum of spiritual and scientific searchers that embodies its significance for me. As a welcome breather from uptown Cluj, tours of the forest are great value for money and a great way to meet local characters like Alex and Marius, who ensure that the forest is not over-exploited and guarantee the experience you want. I fully recommend Hoia as a must for any tour of Transylvania since it complements the Gothic wonderment of Brasov cathedral, the stunning salt mines at the unfortunately named Turda, Bran Castle and the brooding Lake Tarnita with its resident Nessie-style occupants. Where there’s a lake, there’s a monster;

where there’s a forest, there’s a spectre!

For more pictures of the Hoia Baciú forest visit www.instagram.com/hoiabaciuforest/

NOTES

1 The *Strigoi* are a generic type of spirit of the dead; shapeshifters, they seek out victims to drink their blood – forest vampires. The *lele* are a far more attractive proposition, being virgin fairies who specialise in dancing through the treetops. Apparently found in groups of three or seven their mission is to seduce men and draw them into the forest to dance.

2 The Starcevo-Koros-Cris Culture combines three Neolithic groups who had a presence in South Eastern and Central Europe between 5500 and 4500 BC.

3 The Dacian Empire, at its height a rival to Roman supremacy in Central Europe, held sway in what is now predominantly Romania with the Carpathian Mountains at its centre between 82 BC and AD 106.

4 *From Normal to Paranormal, Vol. 1* [Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1991]; *From Normal to Paranormal, Vol. 2* [Sincron, Cluj-Napoca, 1992]; *From Normal to Paranormal, 2nd Ed. (revised)*, [Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1993]. Available only in Romanian.

❖ **CHRIS HILL** is an experimental musician and composer with a lifelong interest in occultism, and anomalous encounters. On occasion, he teaches English.

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A MISCELLANY OF MERSEYSIDE MYSTERIES

Everyone in Merseyside seems to have at least one strange story to tell – and they often seem to tell them to **ROB GANDY**, who returns to FT with another armful of anomalous accounts, this time including phantom planes, time-slips and a ghostly ARP warden...



ADAM EDWARDS / STOCKIMO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



IAN WALDIE / GETTY IMAGES

FACING PAGE: Liverpool's Bold Street appears to be something of a hotspot for time-slips, like the one recorded on p40. **ABOVE:** Seeing Concorde seemingly taking off from behind a hedge in an ordinary farmer's field was unexpected – and remains unexplained.

Readers of my *FT* articles will know that I have a particular interest in collecting and recording testimonies of genuinely weird first- and second-hand experiences that people have had. I infer that my articles and presentations mean that individuals are comfortable approaching me, knowing that they will receive a sympathetic ear; although I always ensure that I 'test' their stories as far as is reasonably possible for authenticity, consistency and completeness. Following my "Strange Stories From Southport" article (**FT370:42-45**) I received a number of stories via *FT* itself and through direct communication (see Rob Bray's 'It Happened to Me' accounts, **FT375:77**, for example). I was also given new stories by attendees at my occasional fundraising events. As a result, I found that I had an eclectic collection of extraordinary testimonies, where the only real connection between them is that they all have some link to the Merseyside area. Therefore, I present herein a veritable smorgasbord of the bizarre for your delectation.

PHANTOM CONCORDE

It was mid to late August 1975, and Len Chester (pseudonym) was 15 years of age. Together with his mother and father (now deceased) he had gone on a weekend trip to Shropshire in the old ambulance that his dad had converted into a mobile home/caravanette. They stayed at a campsite in either Arley or Hampton Loade, and visited the Severn Valley Railway, where there was a locomotive that he was particularly

Behind a low hedge, they saw the unmistakable shape of Concorde

interested in. It had recently arrived in an un-restored state and was at Bewdley Station that weekend. They travelled on a steam train, which got delayed for a while at Hampton Loade station. Everyone disembarked onto the sunny platform until the delay was over, including, as Len recalls, a carriage full of nuns. Just then, a Spitfire aircraft flew past and someone remarked that they thought there was an air show in the vicinity.

Later that day, a fine Sunday afternoon, they left for their home on Merseyside. They had not travelled very far, perhaps 15-20 minutes into the journey; Len's father did not drive fast and therefore they were probably north of Bridgnorth on the A442, which was the most direct route. This is reinforced by Len's clear recollection that nearer home they passed an overbridge of the old Ellesmere branch line, which is situated on the A525 between Whitchurch and Wrexham.

They were in open countryside when suddenly to their left, behind a low hedge, they saw the quite unmistakable shape of

Concorde appear! What was remarkable – or ridiculous – about this was that its height – some 10-15ft (3-4.6m) above the ground – speed and angle made it appear that it had only just taken off. (Len remembers that the undercarriage was still deployed, but he accepts that he may be filling gaps in his memory). This was strange enough in itself, but all three of the family commented that it had seemingly taken off from what was just an ordinary farmers' field. Len is very clear about this fact because what struck them as being very odd was that they were not near any airfield. Len recalls that Concorde was parallel to them, also heading north, and about 100 yards away. He cannot remember whether or not they heard any noise from the aircraft, despite its close proximity; again, this might just be his memory. The aircraft disappeared from view behind hedges and trees as they continued up the road, and was then nowhere to be seen.

Len has tried to rationalise this event over the years. Perhaps it was part of the air show that had been suggested by one of the people who had seen the Spitfire (although spotting a flying Spitfire does not automatically mean that it is part of an air show). But then why had it been so impossibly close to the ground? Enquiries have ascertained that Concorde was not involved in the Cosford Air Show, the main large air show in the area; indeed, there appears not to have been a Cosford show in 1975 (the modern event only started in 1978) and the one in Sleaf, Shropshire, 30 miles away, was cancelled that year.



LEFT: The George's Dock Building was one of the tallest in Liverpool, used by ARP wardens to watch for incoming German bombers during World War II. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Liverpool's Radio City, based in St John's Beacon.

point that he saw Reverend Hayes walking towards him, wearing his distinctive attire. Feeling embarrassed that he had not sorted out the mower, Mr Preston dipped his head so as to appear not to have seen the vicar. But when he looked up, Reverend Hayes was nowhere in sight, even though there were no turn-offs by which he could have left the path. Mr Preston was completely flummoxed by this turn of events – but he was even more confused when he got home and was told that Reverend Hayes had died three weeks previously while he himself had been recuperating in hospital.

A BOLD STREET TIME SLIP

John Moonan of Wirral tells a story about a fellow Music Technology student at Liverpool Community College from back in October 2005, when they were both 22 years old. That morning, while John and colleagues were waiting in class, Paul arrived for the lesson looking quite shaken. He explained that at around 8.30am he had been about to cross Ranelagh Street/Hanover Street, at the top of Church Street, ready to walk up Bold Street. It was cold and raining, and he was looking down at the pavement as he had no umbrella or hood. It was then that he heard the sound of a horse and cart. He looked up to see a very old fashioned horse and cart crossing his path and carrying passengers dressed in Victorian-style dress; the surroundings were also different, and consistent with that era. His immediate reaction was to presume that he had stumbled into a filming location, and so he hurried a little further up Bold Street, again looking at the ground because of the weather. When he reached the steps on the left, he paused briefly and turned back to look if he could see anyone filming. But everything appeared normal once again and there was no sign of the horse and cart or any period clothing and surroundings and certainly no film crew.

Paul was so shaken by his experience that another fellow student decided to search for similar stories. This resulted in him finding other accounts of similar 'time-slip' sightings on Bold Street, of which there are many examples (see **FT126:9**).³

THE GATEHOUSE GHOST

Mrs Jones (pseudonym) of Southport regularly travelled by bus between Liverpool and Southport. Back in the late Spring of 2010 Mrs Jones, a very sprightly 70-year-old, was on her way home to Southport, travelling upstairs on a double-decker. She had collected her grandchildren from school and delivered them safely to their mother, and caught the bus home around 4pm. It was about 15 to 20 minutes

Concorde only flew at two Cosford shows, in 1986 and 1987.¹ Maybe it was taking off from an airstrip somewhere in the Severn valley beyond the field. But no other airstrip can be found anywhere nearby there that would be capable of accommodating Concorde, which required a runway that could handle a Boeing 747 jumbo jet.² Maybe it was on a normal flight but was experiencing trouble, and had to fly very low for a period. But, if Concorde had experienced such serious trouble in its flight then it would surely have been reported in the national press. Perhaps it was something else altogether... but on this point Len has no doubt in his mind: it was unmistakably a Concorde! Therefore this episode must be filed as both 'strange' and 'unsolved'.

THE GOOD REVEREND HAYES

In the 1970s, St Thomas's church in Melling used to have an elderly vicar called Reverend Hayes, who was probably in his 80s and readily recognisable by the hats and cassocks he wore. Reverend Hayes was

As they passed in the passage, the man said: "All is quiet tonight"

having problems with the petrol mower used for maintaining the church grounds, and the father of Jeff and Glen Preston (pseudonyms) was asked to check it over and repair it. Unfortunately, their father was a little lax and didn't get round to dealing with the mower before he was admitted to hospital.

On his discharge, Mr Preston found himself walking up the long footpath between Rock Lane and Waddicar Lane, known locally as 'The Pads', towards St Thomas's. The footpath is about 700 yards long with a clear view, and it was at this

into the journey, and the weather was good, when the bus was on the long stretch of road (the A565) through Ince Woods, passing the gatehouse of what is now a care home. She looked in through the upstairs window of the gatehouse and clearly saw the white figure of an old woman, who appeared to be sitting at a spinning wheel or loom. The bus was travelling at what Mrs Jones considers to be about 35mph (56km/h), but she is certain of what she saw. This was reinforced by the fact that a few weeks later, passing on the bus once more, she again saw the same vision. In fact, she has seen this apparition four times in all. She accepts that prior to the first sighting she had heard schoolchildren on the bus asking each other if they had seen “the ghost”, and that this was probably what encouraged her to look into the gatehouse. She dismisses the possibility of suggestion, though, or that it was an optical illusion because she has frequently passed the gatehouse around the same time and an optical illusion would almost certainly be repeated regularly. However, this was not the case. She recalls the clarity of the image, and added that the lady wore a white hat and had a white pinafore covering her chest, perhaps such as an old-fashioned maid might have worn.

A GHOSTLY ARP WARDEN

I came across the following story when undertaking research for my article “Uneasy Riders” (FT358:42-47) and it was subsequently published in *The Ghost Club Journal*.⁴ My source was Peter Bishop, who had worked with Mersey Tunnels for 30 years up to 2013, rising from Technician to Acting Assistant Engineering Manager. It was Peter who kindly gave me details of police interactions with phantom hitchhikers in the Kingsway (Wallasey) Mersey Tunnel. He then mentioned this ghost story, which he considered to be genuine.

There is an area in the basement of the George’s Dock Building which was nicknamed the ‘bedroom passage’ on account of its being where Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens would sleep in between their round-the-clock shifts. The 190ft- (58m-) tall George’s Dock Building was one of the highest buildings in Liverpool during World War II, strategically placed near the docks, and therefore ARP wardens would climb to the top and watch for incoming German bombers.

Today, the area bears no trace of its former use and simply hosts enclosures with computer equipment and associated work spaces and passageways. However, according to two of Peter’s most trusted Mersey Tunnel staff – one a Tunnel Control Engineer and one an Inspector of Works – they each independently encountered an ARP warden when down in this area. The events were about three years apart, and in essence the stories they told were the same. They had each been walking down the corridor in the late evening, when a man came towards them. The Inspector of Works

said that at first he thought it was just one of the maintenance staff. He then noticed that the man was wearing a greatcoat and carrying a metal helmet, binoculars and a torch. As they passed in the passage, the man said: “All is quiet tonight. Jerry has stayed home.” It was only at this point that the strangeness of the situation struck home, and each witness turned to see the phantom disappear through the next airlock door.

What is clear is that the phantom actually spoke to the two witnesses, or that they both imagined they heard someone speak. Both men are down-to-earth characters, neither given to romancing or believing in ghosts. Peter has known them for many years and provided their names. He vouched for their honesty and their belief that they’d had genuine and inexplicable experiences.

RADIO CITY OF THE DEAD

I was interviewed by broadcaster/journalist Howard Hughes for his excellent radio programme *The Unexplained*⁵ on Talk Radio on 30 September 2018. I was talking about phantom hitchhikers and road ghosts, primarily in the Halsall Moss area between Southport and Ormskirk. Much to my surprise and delight, Howard said that he had grown up in that area, in Formby, and always found the Moss to be quite disconcerting, particularly at night. He then mentioned, as an aside, that he used to work for the local Radio City, which is based in St John’s Beacon⁶ in the middle of Liverpool. One night he was going around the station on some errand or other when he saw before him what looked like a caretaker in a 1960s-style cloth coat and



TONY HISSETT / CREATIVE COMMONS

cap and heavy-duty black boots. He saw him clearly, taking in his appearance, but then the ‘caretaker’ simply vanished. Naturally disturbed by this event, Howard went to find his colleague, who on seeing his face said: “So, you’ve seen him then?” Apparently, this phantom had been witnessed by many people at the station, and the general theory was that it was the ghost of an old (unnamed) worker who ‘checks’ on the building. There was never any feeling of malevolence. Howard thinks that probably everyone at Radio City knows of the ghost in the tower, but that there is a general reluctance to speak about it.

FURTHER TALES OF THE OLD MAN OF HALSALL MOSS

In “Strange Stories From Southport” [FT370:42-45] I provided details of three more phantom hitchhiker/road ghost stories from around the Halsall Moss area, referring to them as cases I, J & K, so that they fitted with those (A to H) in my original article “The Old Man of Halsall Moss” [FT328:32-39]. I can now add two new cases, L & M.

CASE L: THE SOLID SILHOUETTE

Mr N is a 51-year-old specialist motorcycle courier who covers large areas of Merseyside and Lancashire. It was 12.30-12.45am on a weekday night in September 2018 when he was on duty and riding through the Westhead area of Ormskirk, heading south towards

Junction 1 of the M58 motorway. The weather was clear, but it was very cold, with the temperature down to about 4-5°C. His route took him down Lyelake Lane, which has open farmers’ fields on either side. He was approaching the sharp left bend in the lane, at the junction with Latham Road (which is to the right), and therefore kept to between 20mph (32km/h) and 30mph (48km/h). Just as he arrived at the bend he noticed a figure standing at the side of the road to his left; he was very close when he saw it because he was concentrating on the road and it hadn’t been picked up in his headlights (possibly because of the bend).

He describes the figure as being like a solid silhouette of average height, but he couldn’t tell if it was male or female. But when he looked in his rear-view mirrors to check, there was nobody there. He said to himself that “something’s wrong here!”, but couldn’t stop to check, given his timetable

It took about 20 seconds for him to realise the man had disappeared

and responsibilities. He was very disturbed by the apparition, and its possible nature, and admits that he “freaked out for the rest of the shift”. Mr N goes past this bend in Lyelake Lane very regularly, possibly twice a shift, so he is entirely familiar with it. He has subsequently checked the spot; there is nothing there that could produce such a lifelike image, and he has never seen anything similar on any other journey. He considers himself to be very rational and knows that he saw *something* that night, but cannot explain what he saw.

CASE M: A TALKING PHANTOM HITCHHIKER

One night in August 1983, 27-year-old Mr M left his home in Crosby to pick up his wife from work in Southport. He was driving alone in his Austin Allegro along the coastal road, which links Ainsdale to Southport. It was around 11.30pm and raining heavily, and so Mr M was concentrating on his driving. He was about 300 yards past the Pontins roundabout with Shore Road, when in his headlights he spotted a man thumbing to hitch a lift, standing right on the edge of the road. Mr M pulled over and wound the passenger side window down, saying that he could drop the man off in the centre of Southport. The man was wearing a parka-type coat and was soaking wet, and wasn’t carrying any bags. He had stubble on his face and dark eyes, and Mr M guessed



ABOVE: Halsall Moss is an area rich in stories of road ghosts and phantom hitchhikers.



ABOVE: The railway bridge at Spital Station is one of a number of locations associated with phantom hitchhiker stories – but were they all the product of a wind-up by local police officers?

that he was in his mid-30s. Although his behaviour was normal and calm, he had a troubled expression, which Mr M put down to him being out in such bad weather. He was quietly spoken, with a local Southport accent, and asked if he could bring his girlfriend with him into the car, to which Mr M agreed. Staying on the passenger side of the car, the man then stepped to its rear without making a sound, although the heavy rain was making a lot of noise. Mr M then realised that the man was nowhere to be seen; he opened the driver's window and saw that there was nobody there. He stepped out of the car for a couple of seconds and still could not see anybody. It took about 20 seconds for Mr M to realise that the man had completely disappeared, and that there was no sign of any girlfriend. The road at that point was edged with high sandhills and there was quite simply nowhere the man could have gone.

The whole episode took about two minutes, and left Mr M feeling completely befuddled. He got back into his car and continued on his journey. When he arrived, he was told by his wife and her work colleagues that he looked as if he were in shock.

SPITAL PHANTOM HITCHHIKER

When I gave my charity talk about phantom hitchhikers and road ghosts at Tranmere Rovers Football Club on 8 November 2018, I asked whether anyone in the audience was familiar with the phantom hitchhiker that was supposed to haunt Poulton Road at the point where it leaves the Poulton Lancelyn Estate. It is said that a young female has been seen late at night and on several occasions has entered a car before disappearing. Appearances peaked in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷ I was particularly interested because the location is a couple of hundred yards from where I live [FT358:42-47], and because my eldest son remembers the story being told when he was at senior school in the 1990s.

After the event I was approached by a married couple who were both ex-police officers. They told me that there was indeed a story about a female phantom hitchhiker in Spital; however, this was at the bridge across the Birkenhead to Chester railway at Spital Station, about a mile from the location. They had both been told about it when they started work at the local Bromborough Police Station in the 1980s.

They had never seen anything themselves and were not aware of anyone that had had such an experience.

Two things strike me. The first is that I cannot find *anyone* who has actually seen this phantom hitchhiker; and the second is that the location mentioned in the stories is variable, sometimes including the Dibbinsdale Bridge in Bromborough, which is about a mile beyond the Poulton Road location. Also, it looks as though every new officer at Bromborough police station was told the story, which means that it would then be widely disseminated among the local population. But this was just at the same time that Jan Harold Brunvand's classic book *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*⁸ was published. The popularity of the book, with the obvious consequence that it helped further disseminate the very urban legends it describes, leads me to suspect that someone at Bromborough police station had either read it or at least picked up on its classic 'phantom hitchhiker' story. Did they then attach this narrative to a nearby location as a way of winding up new police officers?

Obviously, I can't prove that this was the case, but unless and until I get a genuine first- (or even second-) hand testimony, this will be my suspicion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Bar the last one, the stories collected above are all first- and second-hand testimonies, where the people concerned are convinced, and puzzled, by their odd experiences. They cover a wide spectrum of strangeness, and illustrate that *forteana* can present in lots of different ways, even in a comparatively small geographical area such as Merseyside. Based on these stories, and others that I continue to collect, maybe the county should be renamed 'Mysteryside'...

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SHAKE, RATTLE AND GLOW

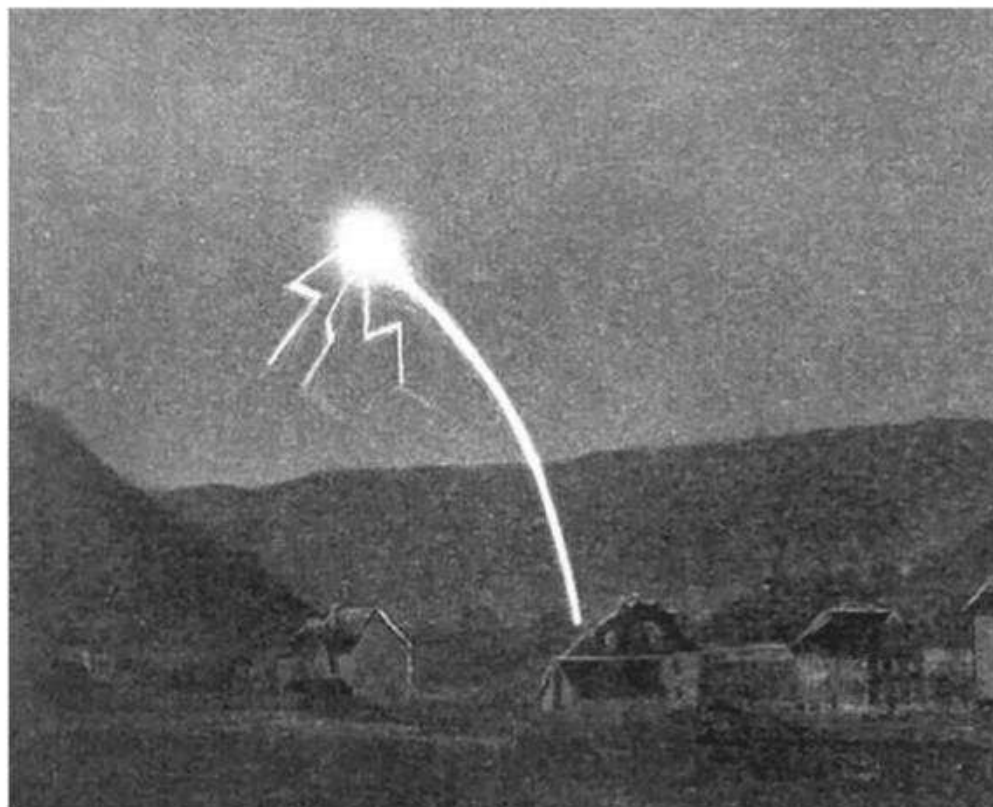
THE MYSTERY OF EARTHQUAKE LIGHTS

Anomalous luminous phenomena associated with seismic stresses, known as earthquake lights, are still not generally accepted as legitimate observations by modern seismologists. Will this forteen subject soon be explainable and its many witnesses vindicated?

SHARON A HILL surveys the past, present and future of EQL research.

It was dark on 25 November 1988 at 18.46 when Joseph Dallaire, a trapper in Laterriere, Quebec, Canada, was leaving the coniferous forest near his home. The weather was mostly clear, cold, with a low wind. After exiting the woods, he headed across the open field to his house, 700m (765 yards) away, when he was startled by a crackling sound approaching from behind. This sound was followed by a 6-15m (20-50ft) high curtain of bluish light that passed him in about two seconds. Then, he felt the shaking from the magnitude 5.9 earthquake that had occurred in Saguenay, 19km (12 miles) away. Dallaire described the light to a researcher as hugging the ground as it moved past him, passing into the open field and disappearing to the north-west. He reported that the light was bright enough to illuminate his house nearby.

What can we make of this remarkable event? The crackling sound suggests an electric field build-up and discharge off the tree branches, and the curtain of light might have represented a coronal discharge at the ground-to-air interface travelling away from the direction of the Saguenay quake epicentre.¹ It was not the only luminous phenomenon noted in association with this unusual large earthquake, which took place within the continental land mass, far from a crustal plate boundary where the majority of large quakes occur. Forty-six good reports of luminous phenomena were collected during this swarm of 67 quakes in Saguenay, which also included light balls floating a metre off the ground, motionless “meteors” (some with streamers) popping out of the ground, and rays and bands across the sky. Though the Saguenay earthquake-related lights reports were relatively well-studied,² few seismologists refer to the Dallaire experience or mention earthquake lights at all.



LEFT: Eyewitness recreation of a luminous event associated with the 1911 Ebingen earthquake.

and explanations from mainstream news and entertainment sources following a seismic event are nontechnical, unverified, and often exaggerated or wrong.

EARTH LIGHTS

Lights originating from the earth (in contrast to those in the sky) have been reported for millennia.³ “Earth lights” is a term that encompasses several different kinds of enigmatic phenomena that are frequently associated with paranormal and fringe ideas. Seismic stresses or geochemical processes that

generate electric fields have been widely proposed as explanations for some floating balls of light, meteor-like streaks, and mountaintop glows. Locations of persistent anomalous luminous phenomena – such as in Hessdalen, Norway, and Brown Mountain in North Carolina – have been studied, yet investigations yield insufficient explanations. Earth lights as genuine natural phenomena remain controversial, often crossing over with descriptions of UFOs and ghost legends, meshing one mystery with another. Contrary to many statements by writers and proponents that earth lights are well known and real, none is scientifically well-established.

FT contributor and earth lights researcher Paul Devereux documented EQL reports from the UK.³ His work was instrumental in popularising the idea of earth lights as an anomalous natural phenomenon and re-established EQL and strange lights as a forteen subject outside of the UFO framework.

SEISMIC-RELATED LIGHTS

Popular ideas about EQL spread in our modern society of social media and 24-hour news channels. Bright flashes that appear

The light was bright enough to illuminate his house nearby

The topic of earthquake lights, with their inherent spookiness, is popular with lay audiences and the media, but the potential mechanisms behind them are highly technical. Their ephemeral nature, unpredictability, and rarity, plus the lack of a solid mechanism to explain them, means that earthquake lights (EQL) remain unaccepted by most seismologists as a legitimate natural phenomenon. Detailed ideas and research on EQL are buried within specialised literature across multiple disciplines such as geology, geophysics, rock mechanics, and seismology, but accounts and social meanings related to sightings are found in natural history, folklore, and historic studies. Descriptions



ABOVE: The Matsushiro Glow. Probably the most famous photo said to show EQLs was taken by Mr T Kuribayashi and shows lights over Mt Kimyo, Japan, in 1968.
BELOW: Jim Conacher's 1973 photo of seven luminous orbs on the slopes of Lime Mountain in the Yukon, Canada. He thought he was seeing UFOs.

in the sky coincident with the shaking from a large earthquake are captured on surveillance cameras or mobile phones. Historically, however, EQL of widely varying descriptions have been documented long before today's modern electrified cities existed. They were also reported over the ocean or as luminous balls under the sea. Galli, an Italian priest, published 148 observations recorded between 89 BC and 1910 in Europe.⁴ Montandon developed a system in 1948 to describe the lights,² including categories for aerial flashes, slow-moving floating globes, bands and rays in the sky, columns emanating from the ground, near-surface flames, and diffuse glows, usually over mountains. But those categories appear too limited, as

the Dailaire event showed. Sparks and electricity crackling on high points have also been noted.^{5, 6} Related effects – such as anomalies in the upper atmosphere (ionosphere),⁷ clouds of unusual shape or colour, fog, electronic device malfunction, de-magnetisation of objects, radio frequency pulses, and anomalies in the ULF and ELF ranges⁸⁻¹³ – have also been catalogued. Surface thermal anomalies 100-500 km (60-310 miles) across have been spotted via satellite a few days before major events.^{8, 14} People on the ground reported feeling a rise in air temperature that was not reflected in the recorded local ground temperature.^{6, 15, 16, 17} Fluctuation in groundwater levels and radon gas concentrations are well-documented effects of seismic events.^{18, 19}

Folkloric precursors, such as strange animal behaviour, plant responses, and “earthquake weather”, are dubious and highly unreliable, but not altogether discountable if they are associated with potential mechanisms for producing EQL, as discussed below.

EQL have been reported a few moments prior to, many weeks before, during, or shortly after shaking is felt, reportedly seconds to minutes in duration. While mainly associated with events above magnitude 5, there are several exceptions. One researcher estimates EQL may occur only in association with five to six per cent of all quakes.⁴

KEY OBSERVATIONS

The bulk of EQL evidence remains anecdotal and unconfirmed. Only in recent decades have cameras become ubiquitous and portable enough to better capture transient and rare natural phenomena. A handful of photographs exist that claim documentation of EQL. Though many Internet sources claim to show evidence of them, these often depict other phenomena like electrical arcing, exploding electric transformers, or iridescent clouds. What follows are some key events that spurred scientific interest or provided good evidence for further examination of EQL.

Matsushiro glow: From 1965-7, a swarm of quakes called the Matsushiro events occurred in Japan. Mr T Kuribayashi, a dentist and amateur photographer, took a series of photos during a 1966 quake, showing a sustained hemispherical glow over Mt Kimyo, lasting about 90 seconds, after which the glow diminished. This





ABOVE: The Brasov flames, photographed by Mihai Danciu in Romania in 1978, 100km (60 miles) from a quake. **BELOW:** Flashes recorded by surveillance cameras during the 2017 Mexico City quake.

striking glow was not coincident with the quake movement, indicating the lights were caused by something other than fault movement. Other glows observed associated with the same event lasted from 10 seconds to two minutes and the seismicity was accompanied by an anomalous increase in the total geomagnetic field.²⁰ One photo in this series is frequently featured as an example of EQLs. John Derr of the US Geological Survey, who developed a sustained interest in EQL and advocated that they be studied further, considered these photographs (published in 1973) as the best evidence for EQL so far.⁵

Lime Mountain orbs: While boating on Taglish Lake, Yukon, Canada, on a Canada Day (1 July) holiday weekend, Jim Conacher photographed seven luminous globes on the slopes of Lime Mountain. He thought he was seeing UFOs, reporting that the slow-moving orbs travelled in curious paths, sometimes upwards, unlike a solid object exhibiting ballistic motion. The Cross Sound earthquake, magnitude 6.7, occurred a few hours later on the suspected date of the photo in 1973.²¹ There were no known causes for human-related lights to appear on the slopes.⁴

Brasov flames: Not widely circulated, a dramatic, spectral photo from Brasov, Romania, reportedly depicts bright flame-like lights near the ground. The photo was reportedly taken 100km (60 miles) from a magnitude 7.4 quake in the Vrancea Mountains in 1977. According to John Derr, some researchers believe this photo may represent defects introduced in photo processing instead of what the witness claimed to see.²² Damage and loss of life occurred in Bucharest resulting from the vertical slip of a thrust fault.⁴ Earlier

Eyewitnesses described the sky lit up by fireballs and beams of light

quakes in this location, in 1838 and 1940, also were associated with EQL reports.

New Madrid, Missouri, catastrophe: The historic New Madrid quake of 1811 took place near the Mississippi River in an area of America sparsely populated at the time. An incredible 104,000km² (40,000 square miles) of land was affected by the estimated ~7.9 magnitude mid-continent quake. Luminous phenomena were seen in

the epicentral area, including sparks from the earth, exploding flashes, and lightning in the sky. At a distance of up to 600km (373 miles) away, people also saw flashes from the direction of the quake and reported a glowing sky like “fires in the air”.^{4, 23}

Great Tangshan quake: Fireballs and flashes were seen 320km (200 miles) away from Tangshan, China, in 1976. The next night, a 7.8 magnitude quake occurred that killed an estimated 240,000 people. Changes in ground resistivity were recorded and there were some reports of fish acting strangely;²⁴ however, these events were not recognised as obvious precursors as they had been in the 1975 Haicheng quake, when Chinese scientists successfully predicted the quake and evacuated the city. The Tangshan quake was not preceded by foreshocks.

Sonora, Mexico/Arizona event: A 7.2 magnitude quake that occurred in 1887 in Sonora, Mexico, was very strong for this area with fault movement extending into Arizona. People apparently thought that volcanoes were erupting as they observed blazing craters on the mountains.²⁵ Scientists discovered scorched trees over the fault line.⁵

Idu peninsula: 1,500 reports of luminous phenomena were associated with the 1930 Idu peninsula quake in Japan. It occurred at 4.30am, and carefully recorded eyewitness reports included descriptions of the sky lit up by fireballs and beams and columns of light. A series of round lights in a straight line were seen moving through the sky.⁵

Kobe, Japan: Seconds before the 1995 magnitude 7.2 quake in Kobe, Japan, blue-white light streaks were observed issuing from the fault area. The longest lasted more than 30 seconds. White luminous hemispheres 100-200m (330-660ft) wide appeared near the ground and floated upwards. Flashes appeared at the same time as the shaking, even on the little-industrialised island of Awaji. At the surface exposure of the fault, plant roots were found



scorched, the minerals had been locally heated high enough to melt silicates in the rock. ^{26, 27}

L'Aquila, Italy: Fidani ⁶ published a study of observations from L'Aquila, Italy, in 2010. After several foreshocks, a magnitude 6.3 event occurred in April 2009. Eyewitness interviews resulted in the collection of 241 reports of luminous phenomena, among hundreds of other anomalies. Locals reported 10m (33ft) high flames emanating from the ground after the main shock and small flickers from poles and between the cobblestones just prior to it. The sky glowed red or orange before the quake, with violet clouds and fog appearing over the mountains. Sparks were emitted from rough or pointed surfaces. 71 flashes from a clear sky were catalogued before and during the main shock. Fireballs, glows, and streamers, similar to an aurora, appeared above. Carlo Strinella, a resident near L'Aquila, had heard the stories of strange lights before earthquakes. When he saw flashes, with one as intense as daylight, he took his family out of the house. Two hours later, the main shock hit. The Fidani survey was done after the event and the researcher declared one of his aims was to instruct the public about EQLs, so we must be cautious about taking these anecdotes at face value. Other than some photos provided to Fidani of glowing skies over L'Aquila, I can find no other recorded evidence of luminous phenomena.

VIRAL VIDEOS

Modern quakes get significant media attention and the effects recorded via security cameras and mobile phones are distributed across social media. Recording of lights, strange clouds, glows, and flashes appear on YouTube and Facebook videos, prompting interest in the idea of EQL from the public and the media. Three recent events have increased public interest and acceptance of the phenomenon.

Lima, Peru, 2007: Security cameras caught light flashes as the shear waves passed from a magnitude 8 quake. A Navy officer reported blue columns of light bursting four times in succession from rocky outcrops in shallow water between his ship and the shore. ⁴

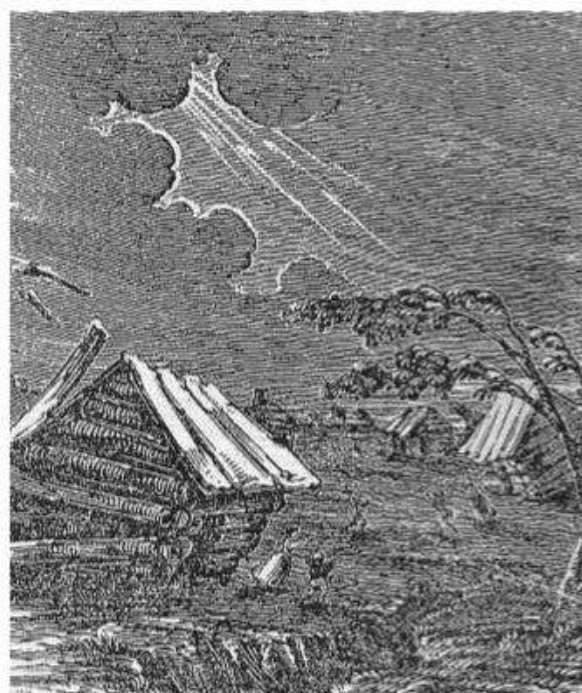
Kaikoura, New Zealand, 2016: This magnitude 7.8 event occurred at night. Several people recorded green and blue flashes in the sky. Flashes were said to be over the sea, but that is not clear.

Mexico City, Mexico, 2017: Several light flashes in the distance were recorded from surveillance cameras and available on YouTube, labelled "Earthquake Lights".

These three visual events were called "EQL" but they are questionable. The light flashes look conspicuously like electricity transformers exploding or arcing, which



ABOVE AND BELOW: The New Madrid, Missouri, earthquake of 1811–1812 was felt over a huge area of the US and produced numerous luminous phenomena, both near the epicentre and far beyond.



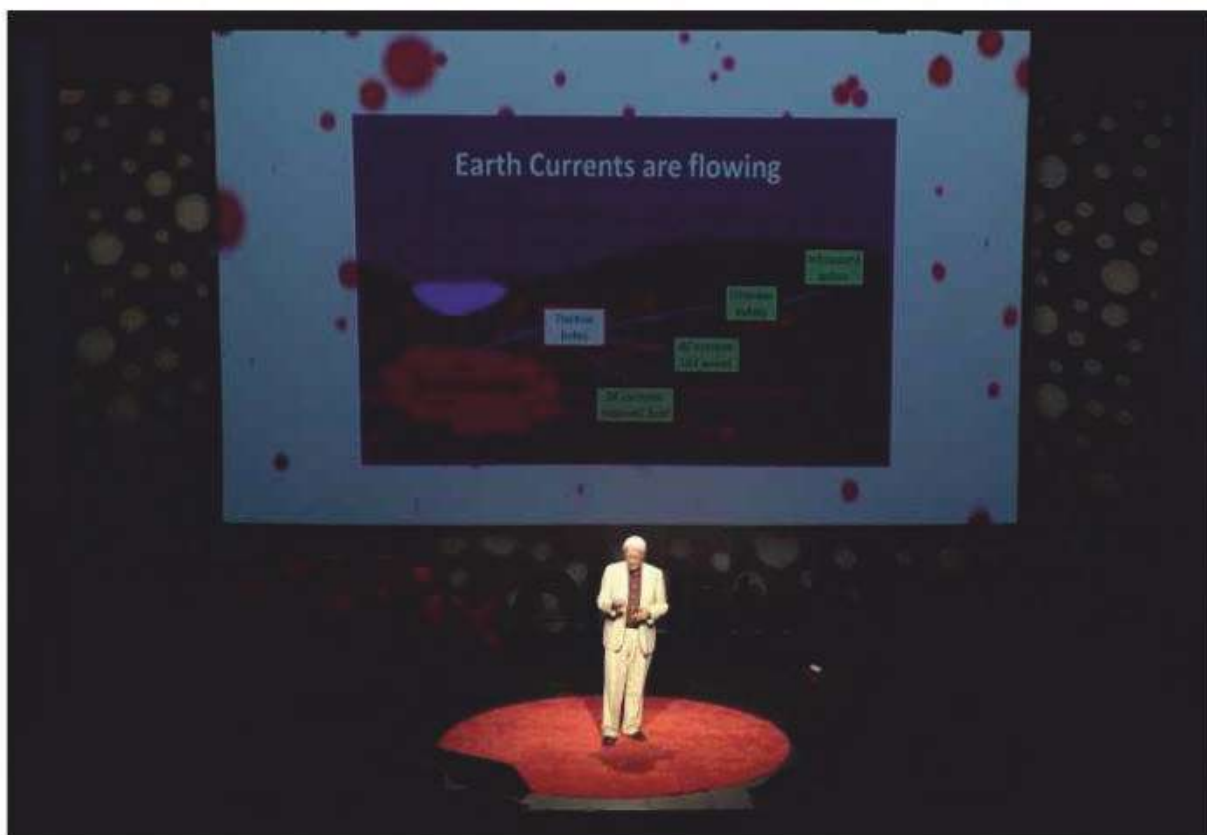
happens when overhead wires touch due to the motion of a quake. These events produce very bright white-blue light that will reflect off low clouds. It is more plausible that this is the explanation for these three particular incidents, because we know electrical system damage happens during large quakes in urban areas. Frustratingly, we have not seen recorded on video the more unusual forms of EQL such as glows, ground flames, fireballs, sparks and columns. Light pollution, the ubiquity of paved and developed areas, and lower population densities of land in a natural state suggests that subtle natural anomalies are masked or go unnoticed. Additionally, EQL will be far less noticeable during daylight. Balls of light may be interpreted as resulting from mundane sources. And, overall, the fleeting, unexpected nature of EQL that are non-coincident with the quake itself precludes adequate photographic or video documentation.

SCIENTIFIC SCEPTICISM

The scientific/seismological view of EQL remains one of scepticism, for good reason. Anecdotes can generally point to where to look, but contain noise and errors. How would scientists credibly record EQL? Earthquakes happen all over the world and within indeterminate time frames. The scale and scope of a network adequate to observe EQL and associated precursors would be prohibitively large. ⁸ Multiple variables would need to be measured across wide ranges of time and space. ¹ Even for known seismically active areas, such a network would be expensive and risky. Not all faults will produce precursors, as subsurface regimes and quake mechanisms vary widely. Perhaps atmospheric conditions influence perceiving precursors. If real, EQL are obviously more of an exception rather than a typical phenomenon. The lack of a plausible mechanism inhibits research: if we lack a sound idea of how they could occur, it is far more difficult to plan to catch them.

Traditional research in seismology has been focused on mechanical observations – ground deformation and patterns of prior events. ¹⁷ The "father of seismology", Robert Mallet, mentioned EQL back in the 1850s in his volumes *On the Facts of Earthquake Phenomena*. In 1931, 1,500 reports existed, collected by professional researchers. ¹ In 1973, Derr called EQLs "well established", based on the many documented reports. ⁵ Several scientists publishing on these topics repeatedly state that EQLs are accepted to exist. Officially, and in the larger framing of accepted geology, they remain notably controversial and widely dismissed.

From the USGS page on earthquake



LEFT: Freidemann Freund gave a 2016 TED talk laying out his peroxy effect theory of earthquake lights. **BELOW:** Quakefinder in Palo Alto, California, is one venture using technology to gather better data.

lights: “Geophysicists differ on the extent to which they think that individual reports of unusual lighting near the time and epicentre of an earthquake actually represent EQL. Some doubt that any of the reports constitute solid evidence for EQL, whereas others think that at least some reports plausibly correspond to EQL.”²⁸

PROPOSED MECHANISMS

Various mechanisms have been proposed to explain the production of an electrical charge in association with seismic stresses. Ionisation of the surface air could produce coronal discharges, sparks, plasma emissions, and electromagnetic anomalies among other effects on the environment and organisms. But a mechanism for EQLs must be able to concentrate and maintain large charge densities that will reach the surface. This charge accumulation and movement from deep underground to the surface has been a hurdle to acceptance of EQLs. Several mechanisms to account for them, and associated phenomena, have been proposed, with the most commonly mentioned being piezoelectricity.¹⁷ Some minerals like quartz, which is abundant, produce an electric charge when pressure is applied. However, this happens in a short span and decays quickly as the + and – charges cancel out due to random distribution of crystals.²⁹ Various other processes that could produce localised emissions may be occurring, but none seem to be able to produce what is reportedly observed as EQL throughout history.

The current best candidate for a mechanism is that of the peroxy defect theory. Freidemann Freund is the discoverer and promoter of this unifying theory – combining ideas from semi-conductor physics, chemistry, and rock physics into this framework to explain the generation,

Time and a bit of luck will be needed to amass enough evidence

concentration and movement of a charge cloud to the surface. In simplified terms, the idea is this: There is a percentage of “peroxy defects” in the minerals that make up rocks in seismic zones. The defects in the molecular structure occur when the oxygen molecules are not in their typical state but are instead connected by a weak oxygen-oxygen single bond. Under stress, these bonds break and release positive charge carriers that flow via grain to grain contact within the rock body. They move fast

(200m/s) and far (several km). The plume of charged particles moves from high to low stress and upon reaching the surface, the theory goes, the cloud can generate local electrical fields that produce air ionisation causing coronal discharges or bursts of light.

As Dr Freund said to a general audience in Christchurch, New Zealand: “When we do nasty things to the crystals [in the rock], they fall apart and produce electric charge carriers.”³⁰ Freund has demonstrated the charge concentration and movement on a small scale in the lab by stressing rocks. He reports that at around two seconds before the rock slab fails, a burst of positive ions is released from the surface of lower stress. The flow of positive charge carriers is away from the fault and, notably, towards high points – like mountains, or areas with rough or pointed surfaces. Peroxys are not very controversial, but this idea to explain EQLs and precursors is relatively new and has not received much attention from seismologists (who are mostly trained in geophysics, not solid-state physics or chemistry).^{1, 4, 16, 17}

The peroxy defect theory has its problems – an obvious one is how to test it. We can’t simply assume that rock slabs stressed in a lab are equivalent to conditions in nature. Real-world conditions will be far more heterogeneous and may not conform to the ideal conditions needed to allow for the formation of currents and the subsequent visual effects at or near the Earth’s surface. Part of the peroxy defect idea suggests that charge flow may be focused in some areas and blocked in others due to the differences in the lithology and fault structure. If valid, however, this theory could account for luminous phenomena of various kinds, but also earthquake fog, strange clouds, thermal infrared anomalies, ionospheric perturbations, unusual animal behaviour, and even household device anomalies resulting from the mobilised cloud of charged particles at the ground-air interface. Perhaps the passing of seismic shear waves generated by the quake can even produce forces that activate the peroxy defects in the crystal structure of the rock, which may explain Dallaire’s crackling curtain observation.



QUAKEFINDER

Dr Freund and colleagues are having a difficult time getting a forum with other seismologists who, generally, still do not consider EQL and other precursor reports to be important or meaningful. There are no statistically meaningful data sets yet. The non-interest in precursor research may be associated with the geological conditions of the US. Earthquake precursors, such as EQL, are not reported to be as prevalent in the US; 90 per cent of such reports are in rift areas in other parts of the world.⁴ Therefore, greater interest in these anomalous precursors comes from researchers in China, India, Russia, Taiwan and Japan, and the resulting papers and discussion are not in English journals.

ESTABLISHING THE VALIDITY OF EQL

The primary task remains to establish the validity of EQL. More reliable data are needed. Monitoring networks and facilities to record EQL or other environmental anomalies are lacking. Considering the uncertainty of the next seismically stressed area to rupture in time and location, instrumentation must cover large areas and record various parameters. Systems designed to detect anomalous fields must be able to distinguish normal fluctuations in these fields. Quakefinder, in Palo Alto, California, is a private venture deploying magnetometers. Their goal is to obtain large data sets, determine local background measurements, look for statistical significance of anomalous readings, and get past the anecdotes.

Much related work is going on in earnest in other countries. Russian and Chinese scientists are actively working on recording ionospheric anomalies using remote sensing via satellites.^{7, 10, 16, 31} The electrodynamic properties of the atmosphere are suspected to change as a result of the stream of positive charges released from the ground surface in relation to increasing stress from the fault. Though it sounds obvious to look for ionospheric perturbations, it is difficult to pinpoint them because of regular fluctuations from solar events and other typical causes of disturbance. Not all faults would produce this signal that would translate to the upper atmosphere, especially those underwater.²⁹ And not all faulted bedrock regimes will be conducive to produce, accumulate, and mobilise a charged stream that reaches the surface. Less obvious seismic areas that have been associated with luminous phenomena, such as the Mochras Fault in Wales, are complete mysteries regarding build-up of seismic stresses, as are the several (seismically quiet) well-established locations where earth lights are reported.

Time and a bit of luck will be needed to amass enough evidence to convince earthquake scientists that EQL are genuine. Until then, reports of EQL after major earth-shaking events will remain unconvincing to scientists but fascinating to the media and public.

A video of a talk on Earthquake Lights given by the author at NASA's Goddard Scientific Colloquium on 28 March 2018 is available at <https://youtu.be/IkxrUIBcYQ8>.

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- 🔗 **SHARON A HILL** is a geologist who researches anomalous natural phenomena and paranormal culture. She is the author of *Scientifical Americans: The Culture of Amateur Paranormal Researchers (McFarland & Company, 2017)* and the founder of spookygeology.com.



DOOMSDAY DELAYED

As the supposed ‘doomsday scenario’ of a No-Deal Brexit is seemingly staved off until the actual Doomsday, **SD TUCKER** asks whether this is a case of what doesn’t kill EU only making EU stronger.

Predictably, my last Strange Statesman entry dealing with Brexit (FT378:52-55) was already out of date by the time it was printed, with the people’s alleged ‘representatives’ in Westminster conspiring to delay Britain’s escape from the EU from its originally scheduled date of 29 March until... well, who knows? Possibly it won’t now even happen at all – a narrative of betrayal which fuelled Nigel Farage’s sensational win in the European Parliament elections in May, with his newly-formed Brexit Party topping the polls in spite of it only having being formed a few weeks beforehand. By rights, you would think the attempted reversal of Brexit by the political class, whether temporary or otherwise, should have dealt quite a blow to the evangelical religious conspiracy theorists we looked at last time who had rejoiced back in 2016 when Britain voted to free herself from the hellishly restraining red tape of the Satanic Brussels bureaucrats and their supposed secret leader, the Anti-Christ. But is this really so? Not necessarily. Surprisingly, the delay to our leaving the EU may only act to *strengthen* such people’s convictions ...

The basic template of the millenarian End Times myth holds that the current period of human history is also the last. Christ will soon facilitate the bodily removal of all True Believers from the Earth in an event known as the Rapture, leaving the rest behind to be ruled over by the Antichrist, who will initially claim to be heralding an era of world peace (just as, you might argue, transnationalist organisations like the EU often claim to do). However, this turns out to be a false promise, and seven years of so-called ‘Tribulation’ then follow, in which wars, natural disasters and hideous supernatural events plague mankind, culminating in the long-promised Battle of Armageddon, after which Christ descends from Heaven, defeats the Antichrist, initiates the Final Judgement, and oversees a new 1,000-year era of *true* peace in both Heaven and Earth from upon His blessed throne within the New Jerusalem.

You can tell the EU will be the institution through which Antichrist will come to rule temporarily over mankind, extreme evangelicals argue, as Eurocrats have left symbolic stamps of his evil all around them.

Greek and Italian two-Euro coins carry an image of Europa riding the bull, as do some Euro banknotes and EU residency permits. In Greek myth, Europa was a princess abducted and raped by Zeus in the shape of a giant white bull – it was her daughter-in-law Pasiphaë who is later said to have slept with another bull herself, before falling pregnant with the minotaur. It is from Europa that the term ‘Europe’ is derived, and her enforced tugging by the King of Olympus is often viewed as a symbolic ‘founding myth’ for the entire continent. But have Europa’s modern-day descendants – the demonic EU – now given birth to a second freakish monster?

Biblical literalists prefer to say that the bull is really the Beast of Revelation, and the woman riding upon her back Angela Merkel, AKA the Whore of Babylon – or ‘Mystery Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and of the abominations of the Earth’ to give the Whore her full title. This is significant, as Revelation speaks of the ‘Mark of the Beast’, which everyone during the coming Reign of Antichrist will have to bear in order to buy or sell goods – including food. It follows that this ‘Mark’ is thus the dreaded Euro currency, and the associated documents of EU bureaucracy without which it is impossible to do business within

the Eurozone. Thus, to be a part of the EU project is to be forced to swear effective allegiance to the Antichrist and his New Brussels Babylon – if you don’t, you’ll literally be left to starve, as the unfortunate people of Greece so recently discovered.¹

In addition, the careless whispers of various Eurocrats down the years have accidentally let the cat out of the bag. Former Belgian PM Paul-Henri Spaak, one of the driving forces behind the whole idea of a United Europe, is supposed to have said the following in 1949: “What we want [to lead us] is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people, and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking [in a shattered post-WWII austerity Europe]. Send us such a man, *and be he God or the Devil*, we will receive him.” However, Spaak was clearly only speaking metaphorically, and may actually never have said any such thing as the quote appears apocryphal.

DANIEL IN THE LIARS’ DEN

Evangelicals enjoy studying apocrypha, though, although they prefer the Book of Daniel which, it may surprise you to know, features several coded references to Brexit. In Daniel 7, there is a description of the titular Prophet’s dreams, in



LEFT: A sculpture of ‘The Abduction of Europa’, in front of the headquarters of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

which a 10-horned Beast arises, representing 10 kings who form a powerful alliance – or, in modern terms, 10 EU member-states who gang up to dominate the continent. But the EU currently has 28 member-states, perhaps falling to 27 if Brexit takes place. Possibly ‘10’ is used by Daniel simply as a generic term for ‘many’. Or, it could mean that some 18 member-states, not simply Britain, are ultimately going to break away from the clutches of the EU Antichrist. In Daniel 2, during the time of the ancient Jewish captivity in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel becomes chief interpreter of the monarch’s own dreams, one of which involves a large statue whose 10 toes – or member-states, corresponding to the Beast of Babylon’s 10 horns – are made of iron and clay, two materials which do not cohere very well. To Eurosceptic evangelicals, the clay represents democracy and the more Eurosceptic nations, such as Britain, whereas the iron represents the harshness of totalitarian EU dictatorship and the more Europhile lands like Germany and France. As Eurosceptic blocs like the Eastern European Visegrad Group and Italy under Matteo Salvini increasingly begin to assert their independence from Brussels, many millenarians anticipate that the 10 toes of the EU will inevitably splay apart and drop off, one by one, as if the Beast has contracted a bad case of political leprosy.

The whole situation is expressed by one online US End Timer thus: “Alone, not a single EU nation is a world power. Together, they are the world’s greatest economic power. Combined, their military spending is second only to the United States... It’s a revived Roman Empire made up of weak and strong nations. And this is what the Bible says will exist just before Jesus returns... A Divided Alliance, Loosely Held Together – The global empire described by Daniel will be divided (Daniel 2:41). It will struggle to hold itself together, just as iron and clay struggle to hold themselves together (Daniel 2:43). Do we see this type of alliance when we look at the EU? Absolutely! ... Brexit is only the latest example of the EU’s struggle to stay together ‘just as iron and clay don’t hold together’... The UK vote to exit from the EU is just the latest event in a process that signals the rise of a global empire. It’s yet another sign Jesus is coming!”²

Confusingly, therefore, Brexit can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, the Leave vote could be welcomed



LEFT: Could that really be Angela Merkel riding on a many-headed beast?

THE MARK OF THE BEAST IS THE DREADED EURO CURRENCY

unconditionally as a righteous blow against Babylon. But isn’t it also prophesied that Babylon’s reign must grow stronger before Christ can return to defeat His arch-enemy? In this case, Brexit becomes recast not as an *eschaton*, or necessary catalyst of imminent Apocalypse, but as a *katechon*, an equally necessary delaying agent of that very same Apocalypse. In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, St Paul explains that, prior to the Antichrist finally revealing himself, it is necessary for someone or something that restrains him to be removed. This *katechon* has generally been interpreted as relating somehow to the original Roman Empire... but, to many evangelical hardliners Brussels is naught but Rome reborn. Brexit greatly restrains the modern Antichrist by diluting Brussels’s diplomatic heft and spending-power, so before this evil being can truly take over, this dangerous existential crisis for the EU has first of all to arise – and then be stopped.

Therefore, I predict, if Remainers do indeed manage to engineer a full Reverse-Brexit – which the Lib Dems won plenty of votes by promising to do in their recent Euro elections campaign – then, to certain minds, all they will have done is fulfilled yet another biblical prophecy, and transformed the Brexit *katechon* into an *eschaton*, thereby bringing the much-desired (to them) End of the World just that little bit closer. Consider the following line from Revelation: “And I saw one of [the Beast’s] heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed; and all the world wondered after the Beast... And [seeing this] they worshipped the Beast, saying, ‘Who is like unto the Beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” Not the soon-to-be-departed Theresa May, evidently; Mrs Thatcher’s famous handbag-swinging to get us our hard-won 1980s EU budget-rebate concession is now, like all such dragon-slaying, a lost art.

If Britain ultimately remains in the EU, whether literally or in all but name, then the Evil Brussels

Empire will only appear all the stronger, won’t it? Nobody will dare to try and break free again after that. But, to contradict Nietzsche, that which does not kill it only *apparently* makes the EU stronger; any reversal of Brexit, by making the Second Rome strong again, would merely usher in its looming future defeat by Christ. To the millenarian mind, just as to the twin Prophets Daniel and Johnny Cash, thanks to Brexit the writing is now up there on the wall for the EU one way or another; Neo-Babylon has been weighed in the balance by God and found wanting, with Juncker’s kingdom built upon the Brussels sand.

NOTES

¹ www.thenewfederalist.eu/Europa-and-the-bull-The-significance-of-the-myth-in-modern-Europe; www.thenewfederalist.eu/Europa-and-the-bull-The-significance-of-the-myth-in-modern-Europe,4280; <https://thewildvoice.org/mystery-babylon-european-union/>

² www.raptureready.com/2016/07/28/is-brexit-mentioned-in-bible-prophecy-by-britt-gillette/ A detailed study of the eschatological EU symbology mentioned in this article appears in Dr Steve Knowles’ 2018 paper ‘Brexit, Babylon and Prophecy: Semiotics of the End Times’, online at www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/12/396/htm

SD TUCKER would like to turn his research into Brussels-related conspiracy theories into a full-length study; if any potential publishers are interested, he can be contacted via FT.



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The Saarbrücken “UFO” of 1826

ULRICH MAGIN follows up an aerial phenomenon recorded by Fort and finds an unexpected meteoric connection...

One who has never leafed through old newspapers (even if it is now done digitally, without the brittle feel and distinctive smell of paper) knows little of the joys of discovering gems of old-fashioned news. You search for a sea-serpent, and discover of fall of frogs; you look for this fall of frogs and find an old, and very odd, advert for soap – the number of happy moments is hard to describe. And then you find out more about some buried snippet from Fort, and you are smiling again.

Listing several unusual aerial observations, Fort, in chapter 24 of *The Book of the Damned*, refers to the “grayish object that looked to be about three and a half feet long, rapidly approaching the Earth at Saarbruck, April 1, 1826; sound like thunder; object expanding like a sheet”.¹ The case was taken up by, among others, George Adamski and Desmond Leslie, and later by Jacques Vallee, who all treated it as a typical UFO.²

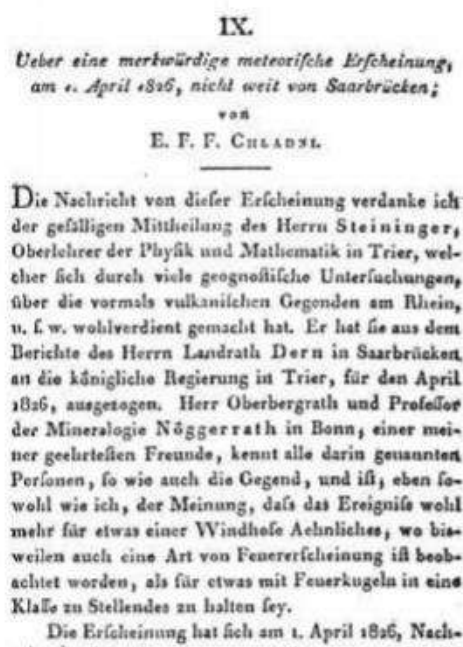
Following it up, I found that the person who had first described (though not seen) the phenomenon was none other than the famous “discoverer” of meteorites, Ernst Chladni, who told readers of the *Annalen der Physik* of a remarkable sight enjoyed by several persons near Saarbrücken.

“The phenomenon occurred on 1 April 1826, some minutes before 4pm, about 400 paces from the brick factory of Heinrich König. Johannes Becker said that as he was carrying some branches he suddenly perceived quite close to him a loud bang



ABOVE: Ernst Chladni and his account of the Saarbrücken incident of 1828.

and the sound of thunder, as in an electrical storm. Amazed, he stopped, and looked up.” However, the sky above was blue, with only a few clouds, there was no wind, and it was warm. “Then, the rolling thunder and banging grew louder, leaving him rooted to the spot and unable to flee. His fear increased when he saw, no more than two dozen paces from him in a light spot in the forest, a ‘horrible something’ which approached him like a flash, moving six or seven feet (1.8-2.1m) above the ground. He compared it to two sheets, grey in colour, 14ft (4m) wide and 34ft (10m) high, which hovered parallel to each other; he did not see any flames. He believed himself lost when this ‘miraculous something’ sped toward him, but it crashed to the ground some seven steps away (or so the distance seemed to him), causing a bang as loud as if 1,000 thunderstorms had broken around him. Before the crash, the ‘miraculous something’ had moved like a roller gate and then spread out like a cloth that looked greyish white. A minute of silence followed, then, from the spot where it had touched down, another loud thundering and banging could be heard, and it moved towards the brick



factory. When he had recovered from his shock, he could still hear the noise, and then the boom of what sounded like a terrible whirlwind. When he was able to stand again, he met a man who had also seen the thing, for four or five minutes.”³

Reports from other witnesses, who were further from the site, were collected by a local priest named Koellner. A road guard called Hasse had heard the thunder, which sounded as if the whole mountain was collapsing. Christian Werner, a brick maker, also heard the terrible noise and smelled sulphur, while Heinrich König said it was like many thunderstorms striking at once. The phenomenon created a whirlwind, which threw several persons working on the fields to the ground. The priest, says Chladni, inspected the “impact site” after the event, but found neither burns nor any damage to the vegetation, nor any trace of a meteoritic stone. Chladni thought the event had been a kind of tornado or – hello Fort! – ‘gelatinous meteor’. He writes: “Now if this event was not a tornado but the fall of a meteoritic exploding mass, it would be one of those where no stones fell but only a resin-like or liquid substance... It is also

possible that the witness closest thought that the phenomenon was nearer than it actually was because of an optical illusion.”⁴

Other scientists later classed the event as a northern light, although it was seen in bright daylight!⁵ While the phenomenon perhaps resembles a whirlwind, Chladni’s description doesn’t really suggest one: a light approaches the witness, moving like a roller gate in a roller mill, opens like a cloth but looks like two sheets, touches the ground, and then, leaving only a loud noise, disappears. One might be excused for trying to link this strange happening to UFO sightings – as did Leslie and Vallee – but what’s fascinating about such old phenomena is that they were reported long before such classifications as ‘UFO’ even existed; therefore, there was no need to make them fit with established models. As Fort wrote in chapter 28 of *Lo!*: “I have plodded for more than 20 years in the Libraries of New York and London. There are millions of persons who would think this a dreary existence. But the challenges – the excitements – the finds.”

NOTES

¹ Charles Fort: *The Complete Books*. New York: Dover 1974, S. 288 – *The Book of the Damned*, ch 24.

² I have slightly abridged this report, which runs for several pages.

³ Desmond Leslie, George Adamski, *Flying Saucers have Landed*, London, Werner Laurie, 1953, p25; Chris Aubeck and Jacques Vallée, *Wonders in the Sky*, Tarcher, 2009, p301.

⁴ EFF Chladni, “Ueber eine merkwürdige meteorische Erscheinung, am 1. April 1826, nicht weit von Saarbrücken”, *Annalen der Physik*, Renger, vol. 83, 1826, pp573–577.

⁵ Dr A Clemens, *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, vol. 33, 1833, p583.

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A Roman caracal in Norfolk

MATT SALUSBURY

is excited by a new discovery providing evidence that big (well, biggish) cats were on the prowl in Roman Britain.

One explanation offered for sightings of big cats in Britain is “the escape theory” – the idea that British big cats are introduced exotics that escaped from menageries from Roman times onwards (see FT224:38). The problem with this idea is that there hasn’t been much evidence for historical escapes from circuses or menageries; the occasional escaped circus lion was usually quickly recaptured or shot.

Sure, the Romans had their circuses and wealthy Romans in Britain may have kept exotic big cats as pets. The huge Londinium amphitheatre, under what’s now the Guildhall in the City of London, had foundations showing signs of a massive gate, and smaller sliding gates, suitable for releasing big animals into fights with gladiators in an arena that could have seated a quarter of the settlement’s population.

The Roman army included specialist *venatores*, troops whose role included capturing wild animals, probably for the arena. Several Roman camps in Britain, including Caerleon, had small arenas, more likely for the entertainment of the troops than for drilling. *Venatores* would have hunted wild animals to be slaughtered before the crowds in local military arenas, their skins then being used for the headgear of legionary standard bearers.

We know *venatores* were active in Britain – the poet Martial describes seeing a Caledonian (Scottish) bear brought all the way to the Colosseum in Rome for its inaugural games. Mini-circuses involving animals, even



ABOVE: Two *venatores* fighting a tiger in a fifth century mosaic from Constantinople. BELOW: A caracal.

imported ones, were cheaper to put on for the enjoyment of the legionaries than gladiatorial games.¹

The bones of leopards have been found in a rubbish heap in Ancient Rome, with leopard remains unearthed in a Roman legionary camp in Dacia (modern Romania). The Emperor Gordian was recorded in AD 241 as having “60 tame lions” in his game parks around Rome, while the *Augustan History* notes that “Cæsar’s herd” had a facility to accommodate new arrivals at Laurentium, near the port of Ostia.

Most of the traffic in captured exotics, though, led to Rome rather than to the outlying province of Britannia. The Eternal City’s demand for *ventiones* – combats between animals or between men and animals in the arena – all but wiped out African elephants in Tunisia and Libya during the Roman period. By the time of the birth of Christ, lions were rare in Libya and were later driven to extinction in much of



DEREK KEATS / CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGES



North Africa and the Middle East to feed the games.² While *ventiones* continued right up to Rome's final collapse, long after gladiatorial combats between humans had gone out of fashion, later Roman circuses featured huge herds of deer to make up the numbers, as they had by then stripped the Empire of big cats and other exotics. As the Empire shrank, acquiring and bringing to Britannia whatever big cats remained in its territory became harder. The whole point of shipping over such animals was to kill them in front of a crowd. All this makes the prospect of exotic big cats surviving and escaping into the Romano-British landscape sometime before the legions abandoned the province in AD 410 a remote one; nor is there any archaeological or documentary evidence.

Until now. Yes, that's right: there's new evidence for a big cat in Roman Britain. Well, not exactly a *big* cat, but an exotic introduced species of respectable-sized wildcat. The latest edition of *The Annual Bulletin of the Norfolk Archaeological Research Group* (No 27, 2018) includes "Some faunal remarks on the Aylesham Roman Project 2016/17 – a dog, a beaver tooth amulet and animal marks on tiles" by archaeologist Julie Curl. This looks at finds from the site of a Roman villa with a pottery and two kilns in Aylesham, Norfolk, excavated in 2016. Here wet clay tiles were left out in the sun to dry; some ended up in a rubbish heap after various animals had left their footprints in them – a pine martin, a European wildcat, newts and a small dog. One tile in particular has three toe marks of which Curl comments: "At this stage of the investigation, the prints compare well both in size and shape with the caracal." Lynxes survived in northern Britain until Saxon times, but Curl says these toe marks are "more oval" and slightly too pointed for a lynx. A caracal is the best match.

A caracal is a species of long-legged wildcat, easily twice the size of a domestic moggy,



ABOVE: The tile found in Norfolk – did a caracal leave a footprint in the wet clay?

Caracals are known to have been kept as pets by rich Romans

red-brown in colour with long, elaborately tufted black ears (its name comes from the Turkish for "black ear"). Caracals now live in the wild in Africa and Asia. Turkey – where caracals are now very rare – is currently the nearest place to Britain to find them in the wild; their range in Roman times would have been greater. They are known to have been kept as pets by wealthy Romans; ancient Egyptian art shows caracals wearing collars. It's not clear whether the caracal walking over tiles in Aylesham was a pet or a feral that had escaped, although most of the

tracks found on the site were made by wild animals. Curl speculates that our Romano-British caracal could have been an "escaped pet, status symbol, performing animal or curiosity." It wouldn't have been impressive enough for the circus. While we know Romans used caracal pelts to make cloaks, its skin would also have been too small to end up as a standard bearer's headdress.

The Dangerous Wild Animals Act requires owners to have a licence to keep a caracal, which needs to be on a lead and accommodated in a "secure outdoor area" with CCTV. In the days of the British Raj, normally solitary Indian caracals were trained to hunt in packs for birds or hares; but the drawback with caracals was they were reluctant to surrender their prey and were never regarded as being all that tame. Caracals are, to put it mildly, a bit of handful for their

owners. So, a "pet" Romano-British caracal could easily have turned into an exotic escapee.

Whether it was a pet or runaway, this discovery introduces something new and exciting to the "British big cats" controversy. Could there have been caracals loose in Roman times, and possibly later? 350 years of Roman occupation is enough time for an awful lot of escapes.

The *Mabinogion*, a series of Welsh tales collected in the 11th century, describes a giant wildcat, the *Cath Palug*, or "scratch cat"; could it have been a descendant of the Roman caracal from Aylesham? Could Romano-British caracals have hybridised with British lynxes, or with Roman domestic cats – more like African wildcats than today's moggies – or with the European wildcats then endemic to England, injecting exotic genes into Britain's feral cat or wildcat populations?

Hybrids of caracals and domestic Abyssinian cats have been recorded – they're known as "caracats". They're still quite a lot bigger than domestic cats and have the luxurious tufted ears of the caracal, without their difficult temperament. A 1997 census of exotic wildcats in the US listed three hybrid cats of the "Caracal/Lynx" type. However, caracals are sometimes called "caracal lynxes" or "African lynxes" because of their lynx-like tufts, although they are not that closely related to lynxes. Official publicity photos of an animal in London Zoo in the 1950s, for example, were captioned "caracal lynx" at the time.

NOTES

1 Duncan B Campbell, "The *Venatores* – animal hunting in the army", *Ancient Warfare*, Vol. XII, issue 5, Karwansaray Publishers, 2019.

2 Peter Verney, *Homo Tyrannicus: A history of man's war against animals*, Mills & Boon, 1979.

♦ **MATT SALUSBURY** is a regular *FT* contributor and woodwose consultant for the forthcoming *Wonderful Beast* touring theatre production "The Last Woodwose".

JULIE CURL

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

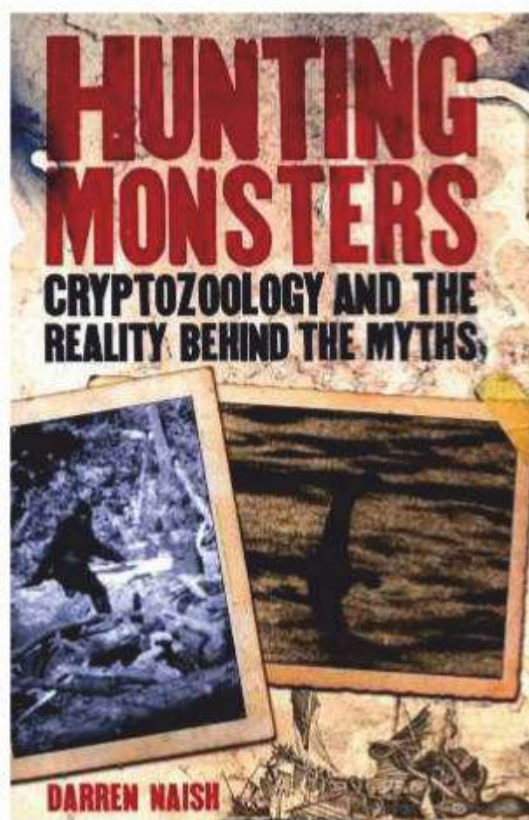
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

NO 47. THERE AIN'T NO SUCH ANIMAL

The author of this month's essential reading lays his cards out early on: "Like many people, I became interested in cryptozoology because – as a much younger person – I originally thought it likely and plausible that such mainstays of cryptozoology as bigfoot, the yeti, sea monsters and so on probably did exist. It seemed only a matter of time before physical remains would confirm their existence. Today, the complete absence of convincing evidence for cryptids – combined with possible explanations for claimed cryptid sightings – leads me to mostly regard cryptozoology as a hybrid subject that, while sometimes incorporating information from animals at its core, is more to do with how humans perceive and describe the world. There certainly are new animal species to discover, but the superstar 'targets' of cryptozoologists are almost certainly not among them. Bigfoot, Nessie, and the various other mystery creatures discussed in this book may well not be mystery creatures at all, but self-perpetuating cultural phenomena." So that's what it says on the tin...

Now, we have commended books of roughly this nature before, and no doubt will do so again if equally good ones come under our eye. This has irked some people. Someone on the fortean.org message board once even complained that the books on cryptids that we'd covered "weren't really about cryptozoology at all", although what else they might have been about escapes us faster than a rat scooting up a drainpipe. That puzzler aside, we *can* say that Darren Naish's small-but-perfectly-formed, and brilliantly, copiously illustrated *Hunting Monsters* will save you much time and a great deal of money, as it deals with all the virtues and flaws of such now-ridiculously-expensive classics of the genre as those penned by Bernard Heuvelmans, and a few more besides. By trade Naish is a palaeontologist, and a conservationist biologist, and may be taken to know whereof he speaks. Those with long memories will recall his presence at FT UnConventions, back in the day.

His first self-set task is to ponder whether cryptozoology is actually a science. Insofar as it proposes hypotheses based on observations and other reliable data, and adjusts its ideas as new knowledge comes to light, he argues, it is scientific. Insofar as it draws unwarranted conclusions from scant or mistaken evidence, especially when that's cherry-picked to suit a preconception, then it's a pseudo-science. Looking across the whole field, it's fair to say that there are cryptozoologists in both camps. Naish deals with both, even-handedly, and with great tact; and amid this discussion you get a succinct and pithy history of the subject. And he is careful



to say: "An interest in mystery animal reports does not... demand or require the 'belief' that the reports concerned describe encounters with unknown animals – maybe some other explanation exists." So, we come back to the subject as "more to do with human behaviour and culture than pure zoology." This could be called a psychosocial approach.

Chapter by chapter, Naish works his way through cryptozoology's major fields of enquiry. Starting with monsters of the deep, and his first great heresy. He is distinctly underwhelmed by the 'father of cryptozoology', Bernard Heuvelmans, and his 1968 tome *In the Wake of the Sea Serpents*. Heuvelmans's approach was, at

the time, radical: he proposed that there were nine sets of species of ocean-going cryptids, judging from their reported morphology; and he abandoned the idea that those that resembled plesiosaurs and other large extinct creatures were *survivors* from prehistory – rather, he proposed that they were evolved *descendants* of the Great Extinct Ones. That at least made some of the reports more plausible. Close examination of Heuvelmans's taxonomy makes even that moot, however, since it reveals not so much a meticulous ordering of cryptid *genera* as a right old shambles. Naish happily disassembles Heuvelmans's too-frequent reliance on hoaxes and his arbitrary assignment of creatures to his chosen categories, which end up being markedly inconsistent, leading to their ultimate invalidity. His "most enigmatic" category is the "surreal" yellow-belly of tropical seas, "shaped like a gigantic" long-tailed tadpole, and striped on its upper surface with dark bands". This would appear to be alone of all its kind, and is based on one sighting, in 1876. Heuvelmans's precise definition is somewhat undermined when Naish tells us that "the eyewitness [accounts] are hopelessly ambiguous, referring to a giant dragon-type or salamander-shaped monster suggested by some to be a giant turtle or ray".

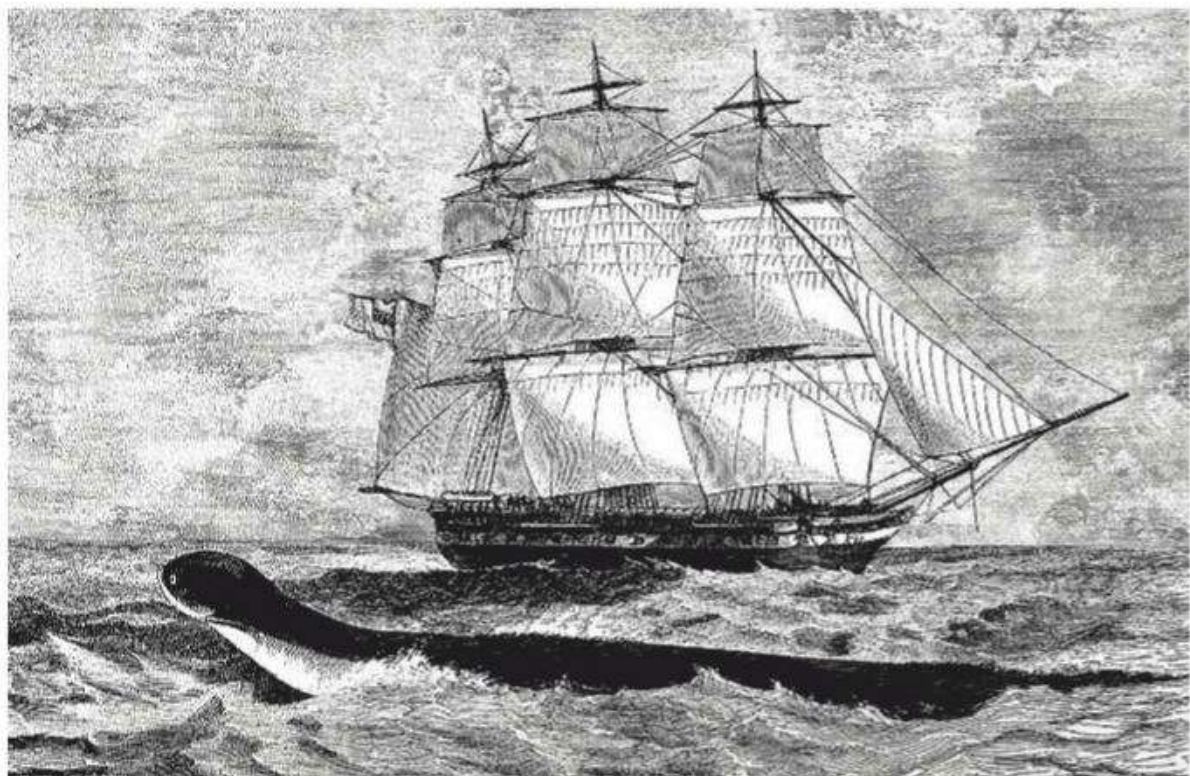
Naish seems to be covertly amused at Heuvelmans's habit of giving fancy Latin scientific names to his alleged sea-serpents, but politely eschews the opportunity to make mock of a 'core report' of a super-otter seen in 1734. In 2005, Charles Paxton *et al.* concluded that what the witnesses saw was a "large whale, [with] its S-shaped penis that resembled a 'tail' perhaps reflecting the fact that this was a male in a state of sexual arousal."

Of course, it doesn't follow that an attempt at sea-monster taxonomy shouldn't be made but, Naish remarks, "one of the most obvious aspects of sea monster accounts is their variety and lack of homogeneity. The picture that emerges is not of a specific number of well-demarcated unknown animals with particular traits... but of a hodgepodge of anecdotes relating to all manner of different things seen at sea." And

people will persist in fitting something ‘unidentified’ that they see into pre-existing patterns, often unconsciously. Naish spends some pages dissecting the sighting of an odd animal spied from the *Daedalus* off Namibia in 1848. Commentary on this seems to have revolved mainly around two *London Illustrated News* drawings, which weren’t that accurate; the best bet, based on an eyewitness sketch, is that the animal was a sei whale, skim-feeding as they do. We report with relief that the condition and contours of its wedding tackle are unrecorded. Naish calls the encounter “pivotal”, because one of the most popular interpretations of the sighting was that it was a plesiosaur, a creature discovered only a couple of decades previously and high in public awareness. “If we combine these two cultural set-pieces... the result was a rise in the belief that people might see ‘living plesiosaurs’ when peering across the waves.”

Naish continues his chapter by offering rather more plausible, if not always incontrovertibly proven, mundane explanations for various creatures defended in the cryptozoological literature, and spends some entertaining time on various rotting corpses that have been claimed as anomalous. It’s almost surprising how many proclaimed ‘plesiosaurs’ turn out to be decomposing whales and sharks. And while he’s also honest enough to note when a case remains unresolved, he is at his deadpan best in regaling us with a number of modern hoaxes. Finally, he observes that fabled monsters seen cavorting in the waves on old maps weren’t meant to be taken real, at least not by the cartographers: they were mostly meant to warn unwanted visitors off, or warn seafarers that such areas were uncharted and thus potentially dangerous.

If we’ve spent so much space on sea monsters it’s because this chapter illustrates Naish’s systematic approach to the evidence that cryptozoology presents and, crucially, *why* it’s so fragile. His next (so to speak) port of call is lake monsters, more or less inevitably kicking off with Nessie. Following the unsung hero of Loch Ness research, Adrian Shine, Naish makes an interesting connection between an amphibious sauropod dinosaur featured in the movie *King Kong* and the Spicers’ description of what they saw in 1933. It’s known they had seen the movie. (The Spicers, incidentally, retailed more than one version of their sighting, with the dimensions of the ‘creature’ they saw tending to enlarge as time went by.) Naish rapidly disposes of claims that there was a tradition of Nessie sightings before the 1930s. Considering sightings and photographs since, Naish concludes from this collection of “hoaxes, tall tales and mistakes” that “there is no consistent biological signal emerging from that pool of accounts; and people engineer or construct monsters based on their preconceptions, pet ideas or influences.” Among which is a tendency to what he calls “creature-



ABOVE: The *Daedalus* spies a sea serpent.

“GOOD FRIENDS, GOOD BOOKS, AND A SLEEPY CONSCIENCE: THIS IS THE IDEAL LIFE.”
Mark Twain

building” – generating hypothetical evolutionary histories for all manner of animals from squids to giant seals, not forgetting the obligatory plesiosaurs, none of them supported by actual evidence. The story continues in like vein through other alleged lake monster reports in other countries (including a splendid hoax from Siberia) – problematic zoological rationalisations, inconsistent witness accounts, dodgy photographs, and plain ol’ pranks. His conclusion isn’t wholly original, but bears repeating: large bodies of water are both dangerous in fact and threatening psychologically. Legends of monstrous creatures in ‘bottomless’ lakes that harbour deadly whirlpools and never give up their dead serve to warn off the reckless, the immature, and the naïve, and encourage them to live to fight, or farm, another day.

And so Naish takes to dry land and the abodes of bigfoot, sasquatch, yeti and the like. He takes a good-humoured look at the claim of one Bob Hieronymus to have been ‘the man in the suit’ in the (in)famous 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film purporting to show a female bigfoot scuttling through the woods in northern California. Hieronymus’s claim to fame (he is but one of several claimants) is pretty leaky, which doesn’t get us any closer to who *was* in the suit. “This seems,”

comments Naish, “to be an accolade worth striving for: saying ‘*I was bigfoot!*’ sure makes your life sound more interesting.” Professor of anthropology Grover Krantz made his own life more interesting – if less so to his academic colleagues – by endorsing the Patterson-Gimlin film and the reality of bigfoot, which he preferred to call sasquatch. Part of the problem was that the tracks on which Krantz based his conviction were consistently discovered by people who, as Naish delicately put it, were “associated with suspected hoaxes”. And their apparent resemblance to hominid footprints is an artefact of the way plaster dries. Among other problems. Naish becomes rather more light-hearted in telling the story of the Minnesota Iceman, allegedly shot in Vietnam. Heuvelmans, it’s irresistible to note, thought this stinking hoax was the real deal. Naish makes an important point, though: because of the authority of Heuvelmans and others, the Iceman created an archetype – with attendant expectations – that influenced other accounts and their interpretation, especially of ‘wildmen’ from Asia. A deeper archetype, he suggests, is that wildmen represent a ‘missing link’ between modern humans and wild nature, a reassurance we seek because civilised man is so estranged from the natural world.

The two-way trade between our culture, of which we are mostly unconscious, and reportage, anecdote, or even hoax, likewise underlies Naish’s treatment of such elusive entities as the bunyip, ropan, and the *mokele-mbembe*. Of the last he sensibly reminds us not to forget “the abilities of Congolese people to be clever hosts to their exotic visitors.” Irishmen and Scotsmen living near large lakes have probably developed a similar talent.

Darren Naish, *Hunting Monsters: Cryptozoology and the Reality Behind the Myths*, Sirius Publishing 2017.

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When crypto meets the mainstream

A superlative zoological reference work contains entries about both extinct and living clades, and solid cryptozoological information, contextualised by the author's historical perspective on mammals

Walker's Mammals of the World

Monotremes, Marsupials, Afrotherians, Xenarthrans, and Sundatherians

Ronald M Nowak

Johns Hopkins University Press 2018

Hb, 784pp, illus, refs, ind, £74.00, ISBN 9781421424675

Since our ancestors split from reptiles 320 million years ago, mammals have reached almost every ecological niche from the Arctic to Antarctica, burrowing, swimming the oceans and gliding in the sky. The 5,000 or so species sharing our world range from the Duck Billed Platypus to the Indian Flying Fox, the Pink Fairy Armadillo, the Blue Whale and the Mountain Gorilla.

First published in 1964, *Mammals of the World* is a standard zoology reference book and an ideal place for 'amateur' biologists to start delving more deeply than the overviews offered in documentaries. The latest volume updates information about the earliest clades (a group that includes the living and extinct descendants of a common ancestor) to diverge from the ancient mammalian stock: the platypus and other egg-laying Monotremes, Marsupials and Afrotherians, a diverse clade encompassing armadillos, dugong and manatees, elephants and certain shrews. Xenarthrans includes anteaters, sloths and armadillos, while Sundatherians encompass tree shrews and gliding mammals.

Nowak doesn't just offer a snapshot of current status of the clades; *Mammals of the World* also examines every genus (one or more closely related species) that lived in historical times – roughly the past 5,000 years. It's packed with fascinating

asides, such as that the mythical elephant graveyards of Africa once had a Siberian counterpart, when drowning or landslides during the spring thaw killed a large number of mammoths.

A superb introduction sets mammals' more recent evolution into context. Most early mammals scurried in the vegetation to avoid a dinosaur's attention, so typically remained about the size of a shrew or rat – indeed, the Common Tree Shrew (*Tupaia glis*) superficially resembles some of earliest mammals. But others – such as *Repenomamus giganticus*, from the early Cretaceous about 125 million years ago, which weighed 12–14kg (26–31 lb) – competed with and sometimes ate small dinosaurs.

The historical perspective makes *Mammals of the World* an invaluable resource for cryptozoologists as well as more mainstream professional and amateur biologists. The pages devoted to the Tasmanian Tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), to take one example, contain a wealth of cryptozoological information. Nowak notes that while some sightings are hoaxes, "most remain unresolved". He cites research suggesting that many alleged sightings in mainland Australia "seem of equal veracity" to the best cases across the Bass Strait in Tasmania. There are hints that Thylacines survived in remote areas of the mainland: a bone from Western Australia has been dated as less than a century old. Would anyone be that surprised if Thylacines still stalk the outback?

After all, biologists rediscovered several species they considered extinct. They once thought that the possum *Cercartetus lepidus* was limited to Tasmania, with only fossils on

"While some sightings [of the Tasmanian Tiger] are hoaxes, 'most remain unresolved'"

the mainland. Then zoologists found *C. lepidus* on Kangaroo Island, off Australia's south coast, in 1964 and in the 1970s on the mainland. (The jury's out on whether the Tasmanian and mainland *C. lepidus* are the same species.) Mind you, *C. lepidus* is the smallest possum and easy to overlook: it weighs only 6–10 grammes.

At the other end of the scale, the woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*) survived into historical times, at least on Wrangel Island, off north-eastern Siberia. Its final extinction was almost certainly later than the most recent dated sample, which is some 4,000 years old, and after humans settled on the island.

Mammals of the World notes that the discovery of mammoths in historical times is one of "the most remarkable mammalogical discoveries of the past century". I cling to a minuscule hope that a species may still range over the largely unexplored Siberian forest and tundra... After all, 165,000 Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabasca* – North America's largest land mammal) once spread over the Canadian northlands. Interbreeding with the more numerous (but smaller) plains bison (*B. b. bison*), disease and hunting took their toll, and many naturalists believed that the pure-bred wood bison probably became extinct by

the 1940s. Some hoped that the it might survive in remote parts, separated from the plains bison by natural barriers. Then an aerial survey discovered an isolated Canadian population of 200 Wood Bison in 1957. Careful management helped these majestic animals recover, though the subspecies remains threatened.

Tragically, we have not even the finest sliver of hope of encountering other remarkable mammals. Some 175 species and



subspecies of *Proboscidea* – the order that includes elephants – have become extinct, for example, as has, famously, the Steller's Sea Cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*). Dugongs and

manatees form the order Sirenia, a name that seems to reflect dugongs' "supposed mermaid-like nursing" of their calves. Some folklorists believe that dugongs and manatees gave rise to the myths of sirens and mermaids. Other than whales, Steller's Sea Cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*) could be the largest mammal in historical times, possibly weighing up to 11,000kg (10.8 tons). *Mammals of the World* reports that the average African Savannah Bull elephant weighs about 5,000kg (4.9 tons).

The Steller's Sea Cow population was vulnerable even when discovered in 1741 by a Russian expedition led by Captain Vitus Bering on the now eponymous island. *H. gigas*'s common name commemorates the voyage's naturalist, Georg Wilhelm Steller. At the time, 2,000–3,000 Steller's Sea Cows lived on the Bering and Copper islands, the last remnant of what was probably a much wider

Continued on p60

Fortean gaming

It needs a few tweaks, but what *FT* reader would not get fun out of a crypto boardgame?

Cryptid

The boardgame

Hal Duncan & Ruth Veevers

Osprey Publishing 2018

£29.99, ISBN 9781472830654

I had some idea of what I wanted from this game: cryptozoological creatures and decisions based on strategies to encounter them. What we get instead are counters, cards and booklets with numbers. How cryptozoological could this be? But this deduction game was probably the main challenge to my preconceptions this month.

At least three players receive a clue about the location of the unspecified, unseen creature. The board, which is split into six tiles, is assembled according to one of about 50 plans. Play consists in either searching a new habitat or questioning another player, placing counters in eliminated areas, and ‘exploring’ a possible one. Possible locations are marked with a disc, impossible ones with a cube, and players glean more information from them as the terrain is searched. Clues come in six kinds: the habitat is within one, two or three spaces of a lake, desert, mountain, forest, structure or animal territory. As guesses turn, hopefully, into deductions, the sharpest player will locate the cryptid. They may also be the luckiest, as happened in our opening two games, as the first player guessed the correct location on their first go twice, an unlikely event that enriched the fortean theme. After that, things proceeded more or less as the designers intended.

Everyone is constantly involved. Even if it’s not your go, you need to express what you know about the location under question.

This creates a rising tension as everyone places a disc on the location under scrutiny, for if everyone places a disc (denoting the possible location), the searching player has won the game. A problem occurs if a player makes a mistake when indicating where the creature is or isn’t (not difficult), making the game unresolvable, though you don’t realise this until towards the last possible moves, when everyone realises how they’ve wasted their time. That is frustrating, as is a rule book in dire need of parsing into a unambiguous step-by-step of turns and objectives. The option of questioning another



player seems to exist only to misdirect other players, players tend only to search. In ‘advanced mode’, the clues are inverted (eg. the habitat is not within one space of a forest), making the deduction much harder, a nice evolution.

This is an ingenious logic-based system for revealing a hidden objective. The more players can remember (or note), the better their chances. I wanted to consider my moves, but unless your brain is good at comparing a fair amount of abstract information, the tendency is to want to get on with it and hazard inspired guesses (worked for me, once). *Cryptid* might have benefitted from being a hidden movement game (like *Fury of Dracula*), where one player controls the cryptid in evading the other players. As it is, this is a deep game with an interesting, if rather dry, puzzle. The gameplay bears only a tenuous relation to the theme. It may appeal to more people than those interested in cryptozoology, but for those who are, *Cryptid* could do with more fleshing-out of what is a promising fortean premise.

Jerome Clarke

★★★★★

Continued from p63

distribution. Hunting and, to a lesser extent, sea urchins’ destruction of kelp (*H. gigas*’s main food source) took their toll. The urchin population grew when the sea otters which ate them were hunted for their fur. By 1768, the Steller’s Sea Cow was extinct.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources estimates that 1,223 species of mammals are Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable. Although it covers just five clades, *Mammals of the World* offers a compelling argument for improving our efforts to protect mammals and other organisms in our vulnerable ecosystems. As the Steller’s Sea Cow exemplifies, we don’t seem to know what we’ve lost until it’s gone.

In previous reviews, I’ve lamented the cost of some academic books. This volume is expensive, but it’s worth the price of half-a-dozen or so paperback non-fiction books any day. A short review can’t hope to do justice to this wonderful, beautiful and (if you have more than passing interest in mammals) essential volume. It will almost certainly turn out to be my book of the year.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

Experiencing the Impossible

The Science of Magic

Gustav Kuhn

The MIT Press 2019.

Hb, 276pp, illus, notes, ind, £20.00,

ISBN 9780262039468

Stage magic has an enduring appeal and I amongst many find it a genuinely thrilling form of entertainment and so Gustav Kuhn’s study of the science that lies behind this ancient art form was a most welcome read. Kuhn, both an academic and a practitioner, has condensed 15 years of study into his investigation as to how and why we may wish to be duped, albeit with great panache! His approach is systematic and thorough, but also entertaining and full of interesting historical and cultural detail. If, however, you like your mysteries to remain



mysterious then this is a spoiler alert!

Opening his study with a consideration of how magic can be defined, Kuhn presents us with nine further chapters each covering an aspect of how psychology and our current understanding of human perception (notably its limitations) facilitate the magician’s ability to bewilder. From an initial typology of the forces abroad in the magical performance such as deception, plausibility and cognitive dissonance, Kuhn looks closely at the neurological conditions that prevail when the differential between what we see and what we know is tested, supporting his arguments with clinical data. Magic, he argues, as a social affect is deeply embedded within our collective human experience and relies upon significant shortcomings in our perceptual apparatus. Magicians, he informs us, capitalise upon these shortfalls and their vernacular of misdirection and suggestion have a sound scientific and physiological basis.

Along the way we are introduced to such exemplars of the art as Harry Houdini and his quest to dispel magical thinking in all its forms; indeed, offering a substantial reward to the first person to prove the existence of spirits. Kuhn reminds us that our propensity to look beyond our testable reality in order to find answers cannot be easily dismissed and discusses how the popularity of mediums and psychics such as the Knox Sisters in the 19th century attest to this. His consideration of magical thinking as one that offers an alternative mode of problem solving and how seemingly innocent ritual behaviour such as wearing one’s lucky socks persevere is quite fascinating.

By referencing keys tricks and illusions familiar to all who lived through the Paul Daniels years and revisited by more contemporary avatars such as Dynamo, Kuhn explores the philosophical issues at the heart of the matter, namely consciousness and free will. Analyses of such illusions as the Necker Cube and Pepper’s Ghost demonstrate how our faculty of sight cannot be entirely relied upon. In fact, it is the inability



of our brain to parallel process that tests our ability to spot a simple sleight of hand, palming or misdirection. Did we really choose that card? By dissecting the most noted of all stage effects – sawing a woman in half – first performed in Finsbury Park by Percy Selbit in 1921, and the Zig Zag illusion, perfected by Robin Harbin in 1960 – Kuhn explores the poverty of our perceptual awareness considering Gestalt, perceptual lag and the amodal absence effect – the filling in of visual gaps.

Moving his discussion onto mentalism and hypnosis as practice, Kuhn considers how the manipulation of memory and forgetfulness are crucial in effecting elaborate illusory effects, none more so than the Indian Rope trick. Considering how easily we are influenced into false memory by pre-set visual triggers and verbal suggestion allows further investigation into the somewhat nebulous idea of free will and compliance. The rather sinister implications of our perceptual inadequacy are explored by Kuhn as he considers the idea of hypnosis and subliminal suggestion, control and reward. This area of study is truly compelling as it both links the world of the stage with far more potent agencies such as the military and how such notorious investigations such as the Milgram experiment demonstrates how moral choice and conformity remains a very grey area. Concluding with a survey of how technology has both facilitated the clinical study of magic and perception and enhanced the entertainment value of magic as performance, Kuhn argues that as a discipline magic is a discourse that needs to find more academic appraisal - ‘Experiencing the Impossible’ goes a long way to filling such a lack.

Replete with reference to clinical documentation throughout and with a detailed notes and bibliography section, ‘Experiencing the Impossible’ provides a fascinating insight into how, what and why we choose to see what may not be there. An invaluable text for students of psychology and burgeoning future miracle workers.

Chris Hill



Upstart crow comeuppance

Did the Bard of Avon half-inch his best known works from contemporary writers? A technique developed by the author suggests he may have...

Francis Bacon's Contribution to Shakespeare

A New Attribution Method

Barry R Clarke

Routledge 2019

Pb, 310pp, ind, £24.99, ISBN 9780367225445

Some beliefs are so daft that often only the most intelligent can believe in them. Barry R Clarke is a professional logic puzzle compiler, blessed with a knack for abstract thought most of us can barely conceive. But is his effort to show that Francis Bacon had a hand in Shakespeare's works also a puzzle with a logical solution? Or is it an idea that only a great intellect could conceive, like a classic locked-room mystery that is plausible only on the printed page? The answer largely depends on the methods he devised to arrive at his assertion that the Stratford man was more play broker than playwright, an opportunist who bought plays from other dramatists and took credit for them (“an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers” in Robert Greene's words).

At the heart of Clarke's argument is Rare Collocation Profiling (RCP), a technique he developed to compare phrases in a target text with the Early English Books Online database of almost everything published from 1473 to 1700 to identify rare phrases, revealing a ‘DNA-type profile’. This is claimed to be superior to stylometric comparison, which may falsely conflate dramatic and non-dramatic works for criteria such as sentence length.

The RCP method is applied to five full Shakespeare plays, Act 1 of *Pericles*, and a half-dozen other non-dramatic works. Comparison of rare matches is of varying persuasion, with the relative

merits of the statistical weight of the occurrence of a phrase in the target text and the database often straining my understanding since some phrases shared by the plays and Bacon's writings plainly match, while others share only a word or two. From a plethora of impeccably referenced sources, *The Tempest* bears Francis Bacon's most significant influence, bolstered by his privileged access to reports about the Virginia Company's New World exploits, an undeniable influence on the play. Clarke also detects Bacon's influence on *Love Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, also concluding that Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe and Anthony Munday were involved in the third part of *Henry VI*.

Valid as it may be to dissect the works to find fragments common to both authors (surely an improvement on the cryptographic approach that gave Bacon-as-Shakespeare research such a bad reputation), was Bacon capable of exposing his soul as well as Shakespeare (or other candidates) could? Can numbers and snippets ever tell us that?

A control baseline to establish the soundness of the RCP method is missing; how do we know that prolific author X wrote his contemporary, the equally prolific Y? How do we know which expressions were vernacular and which were peculiar, or coincidental? Clarke's RCP is a promising and powerful new technique that needs more testing to ascertain its validity.

Clarke does a brilliant job of casting doubt on the Stratfordian myth (as does Bacon devotee Sir Mark Rylance in his foreword), and framing Bacon's theatrical and political career. But the yarn he splices from the threads of Bacon and Shakespeare is weaker than I would like, despite



being replete with research that, while engrossing, is not directly relevant.

I may need someone brighter than myself to interpret in more digestible terms why Clarke's argument is more convincing than my dim sense, blinded by a myriad of semi-relevant details, tells me. I want a prominent Stratfordian to ‘cross the floor’, like a scientist recanting a paradigm made obsolete by better evidence, a practice not customary for the keepers of the humanities, accustomed to hunkering ever deeper in silos of myth.

Still, paper by paper, book by book, a tipping point is getting closer until one day those who don't accept the ‘School of Shakespeare’ will be looked at askance. For as anyone really worth their salt in high-stakes publishing knows, having a stable of authors who can shore up the front of a profitable but incapable or otherwise ‘too busy’ author is one of the great publishing ploys, naming no names. Their works are on the bestseller charts right now.

Derived from a PhD dissertation, this intricate work uses a methodology I cannot claim to fully understand, although I am in broad agreement with its conclusions that Shakespeare of Stratford was more complex and wily than the literary superhero of Stratfordian legend, and that Sir Francis Bacon had the ability and the agenda to have been involved with some of his oeuvre. Short of first-hand written proof (WHERE is the Northumberland Manuscript?!), the mystery of Shakespeare, a literary-political project whose aims and methods are cloaked in unwritten history, will only deepen, due to and in spite of the great efforts of those like the very clever and logical Mr Clarke.

Jerry Glover



The Nazi legacy

Pseudoscience – astrology, ice world theory and the rest – fed into the Nazi project

Revisiting the “Nazi Occult”

Histories, Realities, Legacies

Eds: Monica Black & Eric Kurlander

Camden House 2015

Hb, 305pp, £75.00, ISBN 9781571139061

Eighty years after the start of World War II, Nazi political ideology continues to inform extremist politics, while its proponents are recast in film and video games as mad scientists and evil magicians. This book deals primarily with the latter role, discussing the realities of the occult in German culture from the late 19th century onwards. It starts with an overview of the esoteric revival of the 1880s, which rejected the materialism of science in favour of a more spiritual approach, paradoxically couching new philosophies in scientific terms. Theosophy and Anthroposophy were popular, as was the lesser-known Mazdazian movement, which espoused vegetarianism, breathing exercises and, notably, racial hygiene. The Romantic movement reminded Germany of its essential ‘German-ness’ through a renewed interest in traditional folk-ways and culture, while the cinema of the Weimar Republic reached out to engage the emotions of a nation which had lost not only a world war but also its soul.

Under Hitler, scientists who wanted to keep their research funding chose projects and presented results with care. Hard sciences were unpopular, with physics dismissed as “too Jewish”. Archaeological excavations had to prove the mythical lineage of the German people. Three pseudo-scientific theories that were particularly in favour

were astrology, anthroposophy and ice world theory. All are examined in detail here. Although the German government is widely thought to have suppressed occult movements during the war, the real picture is more nuanced. Map dowsing, for example, was trialled as a way of locating Allied vessels at sea (a forerunner of Cold War remote viewing experiments), and was successfully deployed in finding Mussolini. The anthroposophic method of biodynamic agriculture was adopted as one of many strategies believed to purify German bodies and German soil.



Moving to the legacy of Nazi Germany, the stigmatic Therese Neumann and faith healer Bruno Gröning are considered as agents of resistance. Neumann

represented both political and folk-Catholicism throughout the war and until her death in 1962. Both eventually tapped into Cold War fears and popular apocalypticism.

Hans Bender as the Spukprofessor (Professor Poltergeist) brought parapsychology to post-war German TV. A potted biography discusses the balance between serious scientific research and entertaining television and gives him credit for both raising the profile of parapsychology and drawing attention to the importance of good mental health.

The book ends with some consideration of Nazi archetypes in computer games, particularly Wolfenstein, and of the interplay between Nazi iconography, right-wing politics, neo-paganism and popular music.

This is a fascinating book recommended to anyone interested in history or cultural studies.

Paula Dempsey

★★★★★

The Fourth Reich

The Specter of Nazism from World War II to the Present

Gavriel D Rosenfeld

Cambridge University Press 2019

Hb, 408pp, £22.00, ISBN 9781108497497

In this volume Professor Rosenfeld surveys the concept of a Fourth Reich not just from 1945, rising phoenix-like from the ashes, but how it has biblical roots and is tied to German folklore and the way it arose during the existence of the Third Reich. He has previously written on alternative histories of the Third Reich, but here he uses academic counterfactuals to examine how events of 1945–49 might have affected the development of German democracy.

The idea of a Fourth Reich has cropped up in *The Boys From Brazil*, *The Odessa File*, Marvel and DC comics, even in *Mission Impossible* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* The Dead Kennedys sang about it and films like *Iron Sky* have exploited (albeit ironically) the fear of a resurgent Reich. Postwar films such as *The Stranger* (1946), by Orson Welles, showed Nazis embedded in US society: “Who would think to look for the notorious Franz Kindler amongst America’s first families?”. In *Counterblast* (1948), Nazi scientists intend to wage bacteriological warfare; and in Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946), the Brazil-based Nazi weapon of choice is an atom bomb.

Writing in 1932 at the cusp of Hitler’s rise to power, Kurt van Emsen outlined the Fourth Reich which he believed would replace Nazi power. There would be a universalism in State, Church and Economy. Hitler was merely “the drummer of the German revolution”. A new ‘Communitic-Christian brotherhood’ would emerge. After building a new empire in Central Asia it would join with Hindu cultural circles in the spiritual homeland of the Aryans, creating an Armanist–Atlantic Reich. Other opponents of the Nazis hoped for a more prosaic, democratic Germany.

During the Allied occupation, there were several serious attempts at Nazi uprisings and mass infiltration of emerging government bodies and civil

society. Using counterfactual methodology, Rosenfeld considers to what extent these plots might have succeeded, given slight changes in variables. But Allied soldiers, administrators and German public servants were killed in attacks. Readers will also be interested in an actual plot to wage germ warfare, and incidents of cannibalism during post-war famine in Germany. A wide-ranging survey with many ‘what ifs’ covers the idea of a Fourth Reich through history, the fear of a Nazi revival, the reawakening of fascist parties in Europe and even how the European Union is portrayed as the Fourth Reich.

Not just of interest to WWII or Nazi history buffs, there is also plenty here to provide fortians with stimulating mind candy.

Páirc O’Corráin

★★★★★

Black Plaques London

Memorials to Misadventure

John Ambrose Hide

The History Press 2019

Pb, 360pp, illus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780750989954

Who wouldn’t enjoy a book whose index boasts ‘Urtication (Flogging with nettles)’, though if nettles didn’t appeal, holly branches were an alternative; ‘Vagina and vulva/Used in novelty act’; and UFOs – the MOD’s correspondence with a psychiatric home revealed that aliens disguised as human children were reported to inhabit the Mendip Hills and strayed into Tesco’s from time to time. John Ambrose Hide has assembled an antidote to the respectable lives commemorated in blue plaques in an anti-guidebook for the more discerning rubbernecker (though some of the tales, he admits, don’t bear too-close scrutiny). John Lilly (‘Master astrologer’) is commemorated with a blue plaque in the disused Strand/Aldwych underground station, but his ability to detect witches from their urine doesn’t get a mention. The tale of the manufacture of early condoms, held in place with a little ribbon, is worth the price of admission.

William Darragh

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Ghost Studies
New Perspectives on the Origins of Paranormal Experiences

Brandon Massullo
New Page Books 2017
Pb, 191pp, notes, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781632651211

Massullo, a parapsychologist and clinical therapist, provides a fresh overview of the current state of research into paranormal experiences. He admits that those who seek answers to the many questions the subject raises are facing a “selfless job” in which “the money is crap and so are the hours”. The result, however, in his case is very worthwhile.

His review seems focused and thorough, up-to-date and explained clearly. As a therapist he applies a positive approach to those who have such experiences – ghostly encounters are prominent here – helping them understand and process their experience. On the whole, he finds that the initial confusions and anxiety soon give way to positive life-affirming views.

The Human Experiment

David Stokes
Privately published via Amazon Books 2017
Pb, 299pp, price unknown, ISBN 9781521944493

This book almost parallels Massullo’s (above). Stokes is an author and mental health worker in London, who councils his patients with a close and personal interaction in which he tries to help them understand the sources of their confusion and anxiety. He draws widely on Western occultism, native shamanic practices and an acknowledgement of meaningful coincidences. Stokes, here, shows how his method is achieving success and praise in a profession that is under-funded and under-appreciated.

The Jaynes Legacy
Shining New Light Through the Cracks of the Bicameral Mind

Lawrence Wile
Imprint-Academic Inc 2018
Pb, 291pp, bib, ind, £14.95, ISBN 9781845409227

The publication of Julian Jaynes’s *The Origin of Consciousness in*

The Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind in 1972 stimulated “an unsettling ambivalence” in the academy that continues today. Even Richard Dawkins could not make up his mind on it, describing it as “either complete rubbish or a work of consummate genius, nothing in between”. Wile – a medical doctor who has degrees in physics and philosophy, with further interests in psychiatry and neurology – tries to explain Jaynes’s thesis to us under such topics as consciousness as a property of matter, of protoplasm, of behaviourism, etc... and that it not be necessary for learning, thinking and reasoning.

According to Jaynes, until human consciousness emerged around 3,000 years ago, “hallucinations, poetry and civilisations were merely nonconscious reactivity”. Of course, this contradicts the modern idea of consciousness as continuous, gradual evolution from worms to men. Wile shows that the thread-like structure of Reissner’s fibres in the brain, which degenerated 100,000 years ago could have resulted in the emergence of consciousness.

Wile’s most interesting argument proposes that this process has left traces in the mystical traditions in many ancient cultures. A difficult, complex and profoundly important theory, well-argued and explained clearly.

Bridging Two Realms
Learn to Communicate with Your Loved Ones on the Other-Side

John Holland
Hay House 2018
Pb, 236pp, resources, £10.99, ISBN 9781781806975

Speaking directly to those enduring bereavement, John Holland, a spiritual medium – “internationally renowned” and “much sought after”, apparently – aims to help you “connect to your loved ones who have passed” and, along the way “build a bright bridge to your own spirit”. Those *FT* readers to whom these well-meant words offer some light in their gloom of grief might be interested to learn more.

To those more doubtful

amongst us, it seems rather like a self-important farrago of New Age blathering and spiritualistic wishful thinking.

New Genesis
The greatest experiment on Earth

Wojciech K Kulczyk
New Genesis Foundation 2017
Pb, 228pp, illus, notes, gloss, \$12.95, ISBN 9781999906009

A physicist ponders the question of how life began on Earth and developed over time. A small question but with an enormous implication for the complex interdependency that we see today of consciousness, creatures, cultures, resources and energy. Unlike the Jaynes/Wile book, the author gives greater attention to the physical and biological processes of the progress towards consciousness. Again, unlike Jaynes/Wile, Kulczyk finds all the known processes in failing to properly account for the appearance of consciousness. Instead, the last portion of the book looks towards the stars and alien intervention.

It’s a good, thoughtful read and asks some intelligent questions.

Occulture
The Unseen Forces That Drive Culture Forward

Carl Abrahamsson
Park Street Press 2018
PBb, 272pp, notes, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781620557037

Abrahamsson is well positioned to chronicle the history of this neologism and the movement it represents. In his youth he was attracted to the occult-based art, music and magical rhetoric made more culturally visible by the likes of The Temple of Psychic Youth; the revival of interest in Crowley, Burroughs, Spare and others; filmmakers like Jarman; and modern adaptations of alchemy, shamanism, Kabbala, Hermetic philosophy, parapsychology, sex and drugs (to name but a few of its strands). Abrahamsson later joined its organisation, and still later began touring with lectures, films and books.

This anthology of his writing and talks looks back at the stages of the burgeoning ‘occulture’ – the revealed effect upon social culture of the occulted arts, sciences, music and literature, themselves any form or theory of magic and occultism. The term is, today, used widely, both in the academic field and in pop-culture, suitably reflected in the argument over who invented the term: Gensis P-Orridge or Professor Christopher Partridge.

As a commentary on the effect of various occult movements upon society generally, this is an entertaining and eye-opening study, and all the more important for presenting the view from outside the strict social anthropology of academic scholarship.

Psychic Dreaming
Dreamworking, Reincarnation, Out-Of-Body Experiences & Clairvoyance

Loyd Auerbach
Llewellyn Books 2017
Pb, 257pp, bib, \$16.99, ISBN 9780738751702

Auerbach, a veteran parapsychologist and writer, is always interesting as is this broad survey of the uses of dreaming in New Age USA. From experiences of reincarnation, crime and other problem solving, telepathy, clairvoyance, remote viewing and precognition to overcoming stress and fears, he presents clearly the methods used to induce and interpret them. However, because the book concentrates on ‘dreamwork’ as a modern phenomenon, it feels pretty lightweight by lacking any historical depth. It could have mentioned, for example, a great deal more about the ancient Græco-Roman use of ‘incubation’ at hero shrines to induce dream encounters with the gods. Nor is there any mention of the great ‘psychic questing’ adventures from the early career of Andrew Collins and team in the late 1970s.

As Andy mentions on his own website, his use of dreams, coincidences and “creative intuition” was inspired by the fantastic tales of Tibetan terma in which such methods were used to find long lost holy relics and scriptures.

ETHICAL VITAMINS WITH AN ORGANIC HEART

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What Peter did on his holidays...

Marvel's *Endgame* postscript is a breezy palate cleanser that delivers teenage thrills, superhero spills, and a very 'meta' take on a classic Spidey confrontation in the age of CGI and deep fakes...



Spider-Man: Far From Home

Dir Jon Watts, US 2019
On UK release

How do you follow the cataclysmic events and sombre tone of *Avengers: Endgame* to wrap up 'Phase 3' of the Marvel Cinematic Universe? With a complete tonal shift, of course, into the more light-hearted territory of *Spider-Man: Far From Home*. The far-reaching effects of Thanos's 'snap' (here rechristened 'the blip') are briefly and amusingly addressed from the perspective of students at Forest Hill High, and then we're whisked off to Europe on a school trip, which a grieving Peter Parker (Tom Holland) believes will help him to get over the loss of his mentor, take a break from all that great responsibility, and give him the chance to express his growing feelings for fellow student MJ (Zendaya). Needless to say, things don't go quite to plan, and Peter soon finds himself drawn into a globe-trotting adventure,

Nothing is going to be quite what it seems in a film featuring Mysterio

reluctantly teaming up with a grumpy Nick Fury (Sam Jackson) and the mysterious Quentin Beck (Jake Gyllenhaal) to fight a quartet of giant elementals leaving Europe's prime tourist destinations in ruins.

Nothing, of course, is going to be quite what it seems in a film featuring classic Spidey villain Mysterio (complete with fishbowl helmet!), and the film offers a timely parable about the way our very need to believe in powerful saviour figures helps create a malleable reality highly susceptible to deep fakery of the most nefarious kind. Mysterio's particular brand of tricksiness is here smartly updated for the CGI age, introducing an appropriately and vertiginously self-referential dimension to the film, as well as

some highly inventive visuals worthy of Steve Ditko's original pages.

It's a hugely enjoyable romp of a summer movie, switching deftly from touching to hilarious and back again without any noticeable grinding of cinematic gears (although it is, perhaps, 15 minutes too long). The young leads are all deserving of praise, and it's they – despite the welcome presence of old Marvel hands like Jon Favreau, Cobie Smulders and Marisa Tomei – who really carry the film. I, for one, am thoroughly enjoying this current iteration of a young and relatively inexperienced Spider-Man, and while making *Far From Home* a cross between a teen comedy and a Roger Moore era Bond travelogue sounds like an odd decision, it pays off. The film's conclusion leaves us in more traditional Spidey territory familiar from the Raimi/Maguire trilogy; the final post-credits scenes are both jaw-droppers.

David Sutton



The Dead Don't Die

Dir Jim Jarmusch, US 2019
On UK release

In 1968, George A Romero broke new ground with *Night of the Living Dead*. While the film was well received, it would be another decade before Romero followed it up with the sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*. With zombies having shambled slowly but steadily from horror obscurity to iconic pop culture status, many would argue that they have lost some of their appeal due to their very ubiquity in films, TV and games; it's quite understandable that many of the living have tired of the undead: 'zombie fatigue' has long since threatened to set in.

However, if anyone were to go against the grain of what we have come to expect from zombie films, it would surely be Jim Jarmusch. With his latest film, he offers his take on the genre; like the rest of Jarmusch's filmography, *The Dead Don't Die* is another wayward piece that will likely please his fans and alienate mainstream audiences. Being offbeat in the truest sense of the word, the film's setting is both pleasantly familiar and amusingly absurd. The absurdity is what may prompt many moviegoers to lose interest, as the awkwardness created by the actors' flat delivery and lack of reaction to even the most horrifying events will simply prove too distracting and distancing for some. What makes *The Dead Don't Die* stand out from other zombie films is that it is an absurdist horror comedy from start to finish. Ironically, in spite of its full-blown stylistic eclecticism, the film relies on a very traditional set-up: a small town becoming slowly but surely overrun by the undead. It's essentially a feature-length build-up, and there are many

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

The House That Dripped Blood

Dir Peter Duffell, UK 1971

Second Sight Films, £21.99 (Blu-ray)

Asylum

Dir Roy Ward Baker, UK 1970

Second Sight Films, £21.99 (Blu-ray)

Orson Welles's Great Mysteries

Dir Philip Saville, Peter Sasdy et al, UK 1973

Network, £14.99 (DVD)

American Horror Project Volume 2

Curated by Stephen Thrower, US 1970-1977

Arrow Video, £44.99 (Blu-ray)

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, recession and strikes rocked the economy, trusted politicians turned out to be crooks and even Summer of Love hippy types became sadistic monsters, slaughtering folks in the Hollywood hills. We had entered a decade of doubt, fear and unhappy endings – but the good news is that such times of turmoil have a habit of producing great horror movies.

This month we relive the groovy gloom with some recently released 70s shockers, starting with a visit to Amicus studios. The thrifty Hammer rival realised you could get big names to appear in your picture if they only had to work for an afternoon – enter the anthology horror film, which asked the question: why should a movie have just one story, when it can have five? In *The House That Dripped Blood* (1971) a rambling country house takes on the worst characteristics of its tenants and fires them back, with screams attached. In *Asylum* (1972), a pre-



Jon Pertwee camps it up as a gurning comedy vampire

Jesus Robert Powell tours a home for the criminally insane, hearing each of their stories in gory detail. Psycho scribe, Robert Bloch, lends his economical pen to both films, and it shows. The stories are fun and sometimes scary. The Amicus business model secured a stellar cast for both films, from the always reliable Cushing and Lee to Herbert Lom, Charlotte Rampling, Sylvia Sims, or Jon Pertwee camping it up as a gurning comedy vampire. To see these classics on Blu Ray,



with commentaries and special features, is a treat.

In the 1970s, short-form horror thrived on TV, too. *Orson Welles's Great Mysteries* (1973) was just one of many scary anthology shows that terrified viewers that decade. With a mixture of thriller and supernatural stories, this one was patchy at best. Some of the segments in this Vol 1 DVD set left me shrugging. Yet there are gems to be found, like an unnerving version of "The Monkey's Paw". Welles introduces each story through a cloud of cigar smoke, with a voice and delivery that manages to turn even the vaguest of ramblings into something profound and poetic. There's a killer John Barry theme tune, too, and the release of the series after more than 40 years is welcome.

Finally, cult horror champion Stephen Thrower returns with the second volume of his carefully curated *American Horror Project*. If you get a kick out of obscure cinema, these sets are made for you. My favourite was *Dream No Evil* (1970). It's a melancholy psycho thriller about a mentally ill woman, obsessed with her missing father. It's a lovely mix of touching, disturbing and plain old weird. *Dark August* (1976) sees a city dweller move to rural Vermont. Yet when he accidentally kills a local girl on the road, he's convinced he's been cursed, and turns to psychic medium Kim Hunter for help. The slow-paced chills won't work for everybody, but the mix of beautiful locations, great music and perfectly decent acting gives the film a surprisingly intense, if quiet, vibe. Finally, we get *The Child* (1977), where a little girl seeks vengeance for her mother's death by calling up a horde of pasty-faced zombies. At times it's as ridiculous as it sounds (delightfully so), but it can be pretty darn spooky too. Like when the grandpa and little girl giggle uncontrollably over dinner as they share a local story about dead cub scouts...

cues that link it to earlier zombie films, particularly the sense that something bad is imminent, a building of unease reminiscent of the slow-burning strategies of Romero's older work; Jarmusch's film feels like an homage at times.

This might not be its director's greatest work, but it is typical of his unique style and serves as an entertainingly weird detour from the expectations of both mainstream cinema and zombie horror. Offering wit and social commentary, as any decent zombie film should, *The Dead Don't Die* doesn't exactly break new ground; but, imbued with an unadulterated Jarmuschian aesthetic – an absurdist premise mediated through strangely calm cinematography and scoring – it somehow manages to become the most soothing zombie film ever made.

Leyla Mikelssen



Child's Play

Dir Lars Klevberg, US 2019

On UK release

The 1980s were undoubtedly the golden age of outlandish horror movie premises, and 1988's *Child's Play* launched a franchise that certainly fits that bill. While the first emphasised the horror and traumatised viewers by tapping into a common fear of creepy dolls, the film's possessed plaything, Chucky, became a fan favourite in his own right thanks to the character's twisted sense of humour and the filmmakers being well and truly in on the joke in the increasingly ludicrous sequels.

Brad Dourif's voice acting was integral to Chucky's identity, so fans were worried by the prospect of a different actor taking on the role; however, Mark Hamill, having already delivered an iconic voice performance as the Joker in *Batman: The Animated Series*, proves himself more than up to the task. Thankfully, he does his own thing, rather than seeking to match Dourif's performance in terms of intensity and profanity. Hamill's Chucky is almost sweet, positively subdued in comparison to Dourif's stabby, screeching lunatic of a demonic doll.

No longer possessed by the spirit of serial killer Charles Lee Ray, 2019's Chucky is a reboot –



quite literally. While undeniably still creepy, the deadly doll is not supernaturally animated but instead a piece of tech suffering from a particularly malicious malfunction – which makes it easier to disconnect from one’s strong memories of the Dourif version. Hamill’s Chucky is an entirely different type – albeit one with only a smidgen of the personality of the original.

As for the rest of the film, neither the plot nor the acting is much to write home about; but award-season-worthy filmmaking has never been the point of Chucky’s misadventures, and the people behind this reboot fully understand that the *Child’s Play* franchise is synonymous with having as much fun as possible with a preposterous premise. Just as the franchise took a turn towards blood-soaked comedy rather than the traditional slasher, the new film picks up this mantle and delivers an utterly silly piece of playful horror cinema.

While mainstream moviegoers will probably find the film incredibly stupid, connoisseurs of crap will recognise that *Child’s Play* is the *best* kind of stupid: completely self-aware and therefore enjoyable in all its disposable, ridiculous glory.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Kursk: The Last Mission

Dir Thomas Vinterberg, France/Belgium/Luxembourg 2018
On UK release

This is a dramatisation of the attempts to rescue survivors from the wreck of the *Kursk*, a Russian nuclear submarine that exploded during a naval exercise in the Barents Sea in August 2000. The story is told from four perspectives: the survivors aboard the sub, led by Mikhail (Matthias Schoenaerts); the survivors’ families, led by Mikhail’s wife Tanya (Léa Seydoux); the Russian rescue efforts, led by Admiral Grudszinsky (Peter Simonischek); and the Royal Navy rescue team, led by Commodore Russell (Colin Firth).

The first thing to say is that the film is superbly gripping. Viewers in the UK, due to the Royal Navy’s involvement, may be aware of

how the incident concluded – as I was – but frankly it doesn’t matter. Watching historical events unfold before your eyes gives a new perspective: reading about an explosion on a sub doesn’t prepare you for seeing it happen (even in a recreation) on screen.

The inherent problem with any recreation is accuracy; there have been plenty of attempts to film an accurate account of General Custer’s last battle, all hampered by the fact that there were no US survivors. So there is a conflict in *Kursk* between the Russian military version of what happened and international accounts. Filter this through the director’s requirement to tell a good story and you begin to see the problem. There is a lengthy scene where the Russian top brass meet with survivors’ families and feed them misinformation intended to reassure them that everything possible was being done. At one point, a woman who has been haranguing the top man (Max Von Sydow) is forcibly sedated and removed from the meeting. This actually happened and can be seen on leaked footage – but what the film doesn’t do is show you that the top man in question at that meeting was one Vladimir Putin. This question of accuracy is compounded by a somewhat biased depiction of the various authorities. The Russian sailors and their families are shown to be salt of the earth types, downtrodden and underpaid but faithful and professional. The Russian top brass, however, are callous, intransigent and motivated solely by the need to prevent national embarrassment, even at the cost of lives. The British – represented by that beacon of all that’s decent and kind, Colin Firth – are depicted as the opposite: resourceful, helpful and determined to risk their own lives if necessary to save those of their counterparts. It’s simplistic, to say the least.

Is this the last word on the *Kursk*? Of course not and neither was it intended to be. Considered purely as a film, the acting is fine, the story zips along and the tangle of events is explained adequately; taken at face value, it’s well worth a look.

Daniel King



BLU-RAY AND DVD

BEFORE WE VANISH

Arrow Video, £22.99 (Blu-ray)

Aliens that steal concepts arrive on Earth ahead of a full-scale invasion in Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s intermittently affecting film. A girl (Akira) returns home bearing a goldfish and proceeds to murder her family, then gleefully causes a road accident, while graphic designer Narumi’s husband Shinzy is behaving very strangely. Journalist Sakurai, investigating ‘something big’, is drawn to the family’s murder, and encounters a third oddball (Amano) looking to meet the missing girl. Amano explains to Sakurai that the three are in fact body-borrowing aliens who are collecting concepts, plucking them out of people’s heads. The scenes where this theft occurs are incredibly powerful. How do you explain ideas of marriage, possession or self to an alien? What happens to us if we lose our sense of them? “Do you know the meaning of freedom?” asks a human character “I do,” replies an alien. “I took it.” *Before We Vanish* is frequently brutal and disturbing, but played mostly for uneasy laughs, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in the tone of *Meet the Applegates*. The three aliens veer between being loveably wacky and genuinely chilling, particularly Yuri Tsunematsu’s amoral Akira. There are shades of Romero’s *The Crazies* as society begins to fall apart, with those touched by the aliens losing their inhibitions as they are freed from the ideas which bind us, but ultimately it pulls its punch in offering an upbeat climax. While this suits the lightness of the rest of the film, it does make it far less memorable than the bleak climax of Kurosawa’s *Pulse*, which carries its shared theme of emotional vampirism to an altogether more disturbing end. **Martin Parsons** ★★☆☆☆

BEYOND THE SKY

Spirit Entertainment, £7.99 (DVD)

A documentary filmmaker sets out to disprove alien abductions, after his father died having spent years believing his wife to have been abducted. Meeting a girl who claims to have been abducted three times and is expecting a fourth, a countdown begins as he decides to help her out. The leads are likeable enough, Peter Stormare brings his usual conviction to his tiny part as the father, and it’s always lovely to see Dee Wallace. Otherwise, this is a lightweight film which, while inoffensive (bar the odd musical choice), has nothing to distinguish it. It’s like watching one of the blander mythology episodes of *The X-Files* – competent but flat, and all very familiar. There is a decent turn in proceedings that comes close to salvaging the whole, only for it all to come crashing down again in a double twist that oversteps the budget and overdoes the schmaltz. **MP** ★★☆☆☆

KILLER PARTY

Altitude, £7.99 (DVD)

Some sneaky housebreakers target a house that turns out to be full of serial killers trying to go straight... and a bloodbath ensues. It could and should have been a great comedy, but the decision to play such a barmy premise straight dooms this from the start. The plot feels ancient (*Livid*, *The Collector* and *Don’t Breathe* all trod similar ground and did it far better), and the hyper-caFFEinated camerawork quickly saps any goodwill. It’s gory and tasteless, which could have been fun, but the logic gaps and wildly mismatched performances keep it from gelling. Actors who can be excellent on a tight leash (Julian McMahon, Lance Reddick) get free rein; given their rapacious appetite for scenery, it’s a wonder the walls stay up. On the positive side, the film earns an extra star for Robin Tunney, far and away the best thing about it, and Erin Moriarty, who also gives a nicely nuanced performance and lands the one good laugh. **MP** ★★☆☆☆



SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: *Our Strange Skies*

www.facebook.com/ourstrangeskies/

Host: Rob Kristofferson

Episode Count: Six main episodes + various mini-episodes

Format: Mix of solo presenter and guest interviews

Established: December 2017

Frequency: Variable

Topics: Ufology

Although ufology podcast *Our Strange Skies* has a mere handful of main episodes (six at the time of writing), that doesn’t mean host Rob Kristofferson is a slacker. Since establishing the podcast, which deals with all things flying saucer, back in December 2017, Kristofferson has deviated from the main show into a series of themed mini-episodes (often exploring significant UFO incidents), as well as parallel series such as his UFO abduction-focused instalments under the umbrella term ‘You Were Gone, But You

Never Really Left’ and the self-explanatory UFO Book Club specials. Like sightings of flying saucers in the 1950s, Kristofferson’s UFO podcasts have been proliferating like there’s no tomorrow. Thankfully, you can access all the instalments under the single *Our Strange Skies* podcast feed.

Rob Kristofferson (no relation to Kris, as he is keen to point out) established *Our Strange Skies* to discuss all aspects of the UFO phenomenon, making for a wide-ranging show covering all manner of topics. As he says: “On the *Our Strange Skies* podcast, we delve into the UFO events, incidents, and myths that contribute to the American identity in an attempt to figure out what they mean and what they say about ourselves. We do it with a splash of humour and a guest from time to time.”

Kristofferson has limited his show to covering only those sightings or UFO events that happened in the USA, which in one respect makes the podcast seem rather parochial, but – as he argues – he’s simply drawing from his own experience and his home environment. The upside is that there is no shortage of US-based saucer-related high strangeness to draw upon.

A great place to start is the 35-minute introductory instalment, dubbed Episode 0.5. Beginning where the modern phenomenon itself began, with the 1947 Kenneth Arnold sighting, Kristofferson proceeds to explain the origin of the term ‘flying saucer’, explores the rudimentary ‘facts’ of the UFO phenomenon, and expresses his admiration for the work of UFO-specialist J Allen Hynek, whom he refers to for definitions of various kinds of UFO encounters. Following a brief mention of the Socorro, New Mexico, case, Kristofferson moves on to a quick survey of alien types – Grays, Nordics, and Reptilians, among others – and explores the diversity of civilian UFO groups. There’s also a takedown of infamous History Channel TV show *Ancient Aliens* and its big-haired champion, Giorgio A Tsoukalos. All in all, it offers a solid grounding in the background of the entire saucersphere.

The first full episode (just over 50 minutes), entitled ‘Old Time UFOs – Take Those Old Disks Off the Shelf’, delves into pre-Roswell UFO sightings and ranges further afield than the show’s general American focus, taking in such old favourites as Ezekiel’s Old Testament UFOs, the

woodcut depiction of celestial phenomena over Nuremberg, Germany, and Basel, Switzerland, and others. The show then pivots to consider some of America’s early sightings, including a potential failed alien abduction and one of the USA’s first cattle mutilations.

The main episodes then go on to tackle major cases, such as the original 1947 ‘flying saucer flap’ (episode 3), the American government’s UFO investigation Project Sign (episode 4), the Roswell UFO crash (episode 5), and alien abduction experiences (episode 6). Alongside those main instalments, there are more than seven other Mini Episodes (dealing with such topics as Bigfoot and UFOs and the connections between rock music and UFOs), several UFO Book Club instalments, and assorted ‘Meltdowns’, ‘After School Specials’, and interview-based segments, making for a solid, diverse exploration of the strange and wide world of flying saucer lore. Remember – don’t forget to look up, because you never know what you’ll find in *Our Strange Skies*. And don’t lick the UFO – you have no idea where it has been!

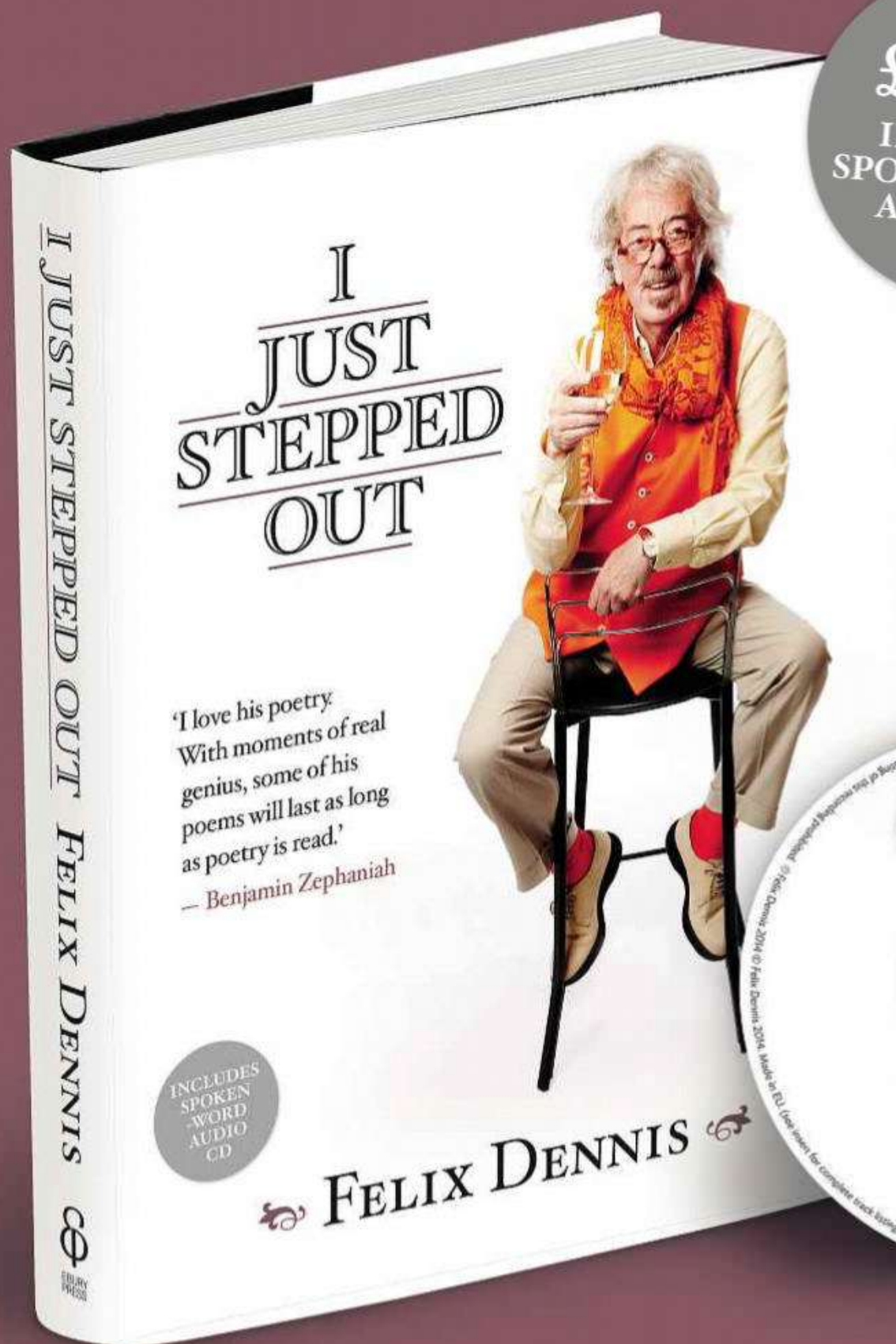
Strengths: *Our Strange Skies* has a nice, straightforward presentational style.

Weaknesses: Some of the humour, as always, can be hit and miss.

Recommended Episodes: **Introductory Episode 0.5 for the basics of the UFO phenomenon; UFO Book Club: For the Love of Hynek, with guest and Hynek biographer Mark O’Connell; Episode 2: What the Hell Happened Here? – The Battle of Los Angeles; Mini Episode 5: Disinformation in the 1980s; Candid Conversation: My Time at MUFON.**

Verdict: Wide-ranging account of the UFO phenomenon, although with a strong focus on American cases, laced with a healthy dose of humour and scepticism.

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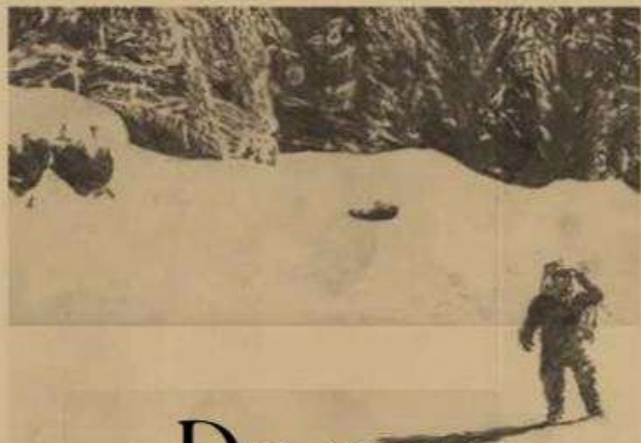
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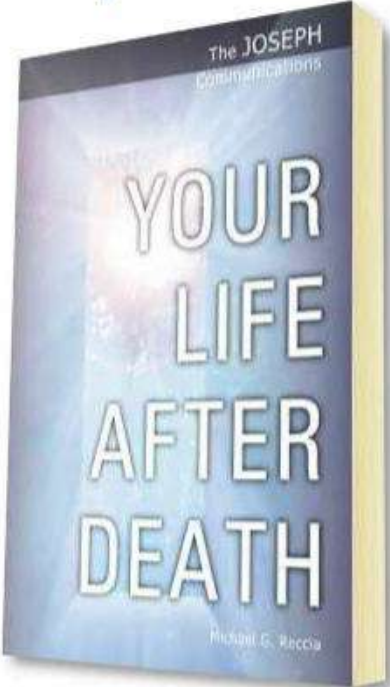
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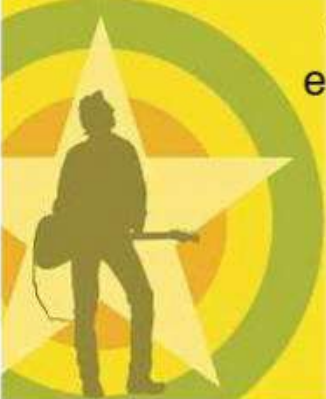
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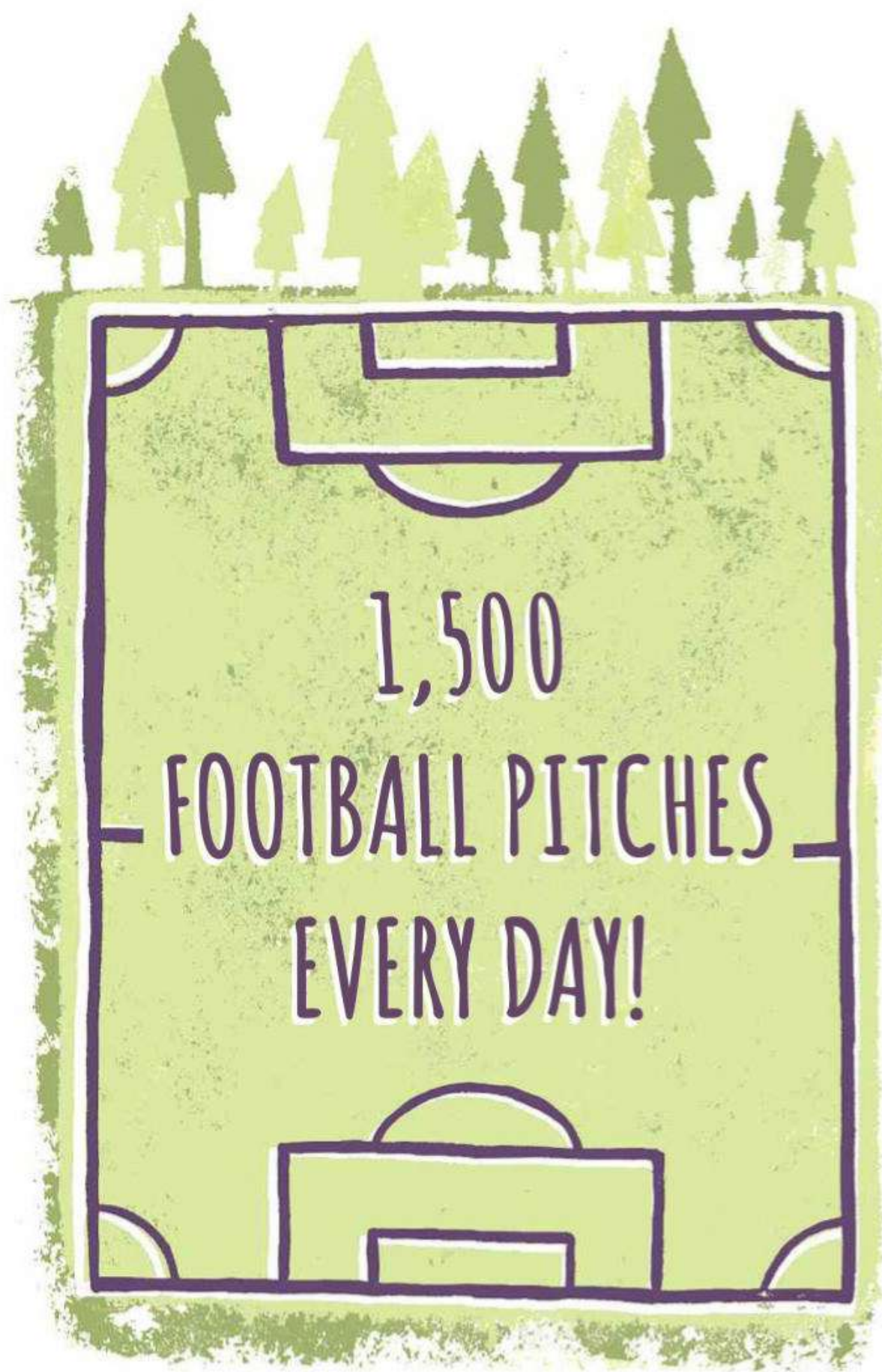
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Delivery panic

Charles Christian
Denton, Norfolk

Recently, I was watching a programme about UFOs on one of the Freeview TV Channels. Eventually I became bored, especially when the programme turned to the subject of Roswell. Switching channels, I was confronted by an advert for a well-known furniture store. A table and chair set was featured but it was the name of this particular set that caught my attention – Roswell!

Leslie Hurn
Norwich, Norfolk

However, there's a wider context to this. In **FT352:75** I wrote about my difficulties of “dreaming a new pair of shoes” and in-

their bodies”. A further parallel is the Swedish folk belief that the Little People are somehow ‘hollow’: if you can get behind them, you can see that they are only facades. (This may not be an exclusively Swedish belief, but I have only seen references to it in Swedish texts.) The general concept of ‘glamour’, which seems to be universal, may be an example of the same thing. So, we have at least four different planes – RV, dreams, aliens and Little People, where ‘something’ generates images for us (real or imaginary), but seems to lack the requisite depth, or resolution, or knowledge, to give a satisfactorily detailed result. (Actually, this may be taken as an argument for the reality of RV, at least as a phenomenon. If these guys were just bluffing, they could answer that the subs carried, say, four missile tubes, and be done with it.) In an even wider context, we can link this to claims that poltergeist phenomena show some kind of ‘rudimentary’, or ‘child-like’, or ‘autistic’ intelligence. Again this concept that ‘something’ is generating something – in this case sounds and apparitions – but not completely succeeding. Voices may speak gibberish, or stones may hit you without causing physical harm. I’ve seen several writers lately (such as Peter McCue, **FT376:30**) arguing for treating separate fortean phenomena as manifestations of an overarching ‘trickster phenomenon’. I can only say this seems a commendable approach.

By all means let people believe we're a computer simulation if they absolutely must, but I regard it as implausible at best. Anyway, it's not getting us anywhere, is it?

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Having recently returned from living and working in Ankara for a few years, I very much enjoyed the recent coverage of Turkey in ‘Strange Statesmen’ [FT376:48-51, 377:46-51]. Living out there and experiencing the culture, two things were very clear: a distrust of non-Turks (especially the Brits – they still haven’t forgiven us for Gallipoli) and the love of a good conspiracy theory.

My wife was the member of various WhatsApp groups for ex-pats and social groups and it would often be on a Friday afternoon where warnings of potential dangers cropped up. The two most memorable were that Daesh had managed to obtain an earthquake machine and were preparing to set it off in Ankara that weekend (I even heard the locals in the supermarket discussing that one). I tried my best to assure my wife, but I think she got caught up in the local





Octoped

I was interested to read the article on Taxidermy [FT380:46-51], especially the inclusion of the eight-legged lamb from the late 19th century. I was given a more recent specimen of such a lamb, which was born in Kenn, Somerset, in March 2005. It was alive at birth, but did not survive for long. I work in the neighbourhood, and the then receptionist at my place of work was married to the sheep farmer whose sheep had delivered the eight-legged lamb. She knew that I loved anything “a bit unusual” and brought

the prodigy into work, allowing me to keep it. Note that it is bright yellow in parts – this is meconium, which is some of the first waste product at birth; we subsequently washed this off and prepared the lamb for preservation. We had a freezer in the garage, where I secreted it, doing my best to hide it from my wife. Unfortunately, two weeks later, it was discovered, much to her horror, and I was told to get rid of it. After some thought and a few enquiries, I donated the lamb to a collector of taxidermy.

Mark Spurlock

Frome, Somerset



hysteria. She refused to believe that such a thing doesn't exist and how would I know anyway? The other was the destruction of a large facility in the city (I think it was a hospital in late 2017) where the authorities apparently knew it was full of enough asbestos to send a large cloud across the city but didn't care. This even made the news headlines in the country at the time. Again, panic ensued

for a weekend, but it was never mentioned again.

Turkey is genuinely one of those countries of contrast – especially between the views of Ataturk, the father of the nation, and Erdogan. The psychological impact of the attempted coup in 2016 is probably not fully realised outside of the country; it didn't help that the BBC only have staff based in Istanbul where it ended quite

quickly, whereas in Ankara it went on for much longer. The Turkish Parliament was bombed while in session by planes of their own Air Force, while Erdogan himself only missed an assassination squad at his holiday hotel by a few minutes. Perhaps we should allow Turks some leeway for conspiracy theory; however, the level to which Erdogan has taken it to further his own ends has also led

to the suspicion that he either orchestrated the attempted coup or allowed it to happen, underestimating how far the plotters were prepared to go.

My favourite Erdogan antidote summed the man up for me. His first job was selling Simit (a doughnut shaped Turkish bread) on the streets of Istanbul. However, he made sure he made a profit by buying up the old bread at the end of the day, warming it in the oven and selling it as fresh the next morning.

George Thompson

By email

Rustic bliss

Lucky David Ward (Norfolk Bliss, FT379:77). He has given a credible account of an encounter with the Great God Pan. His experience recalls Chapter 7 of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*: “This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me”, whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. ‘Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!’ Then suddenly the Mole felt great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror – indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy...”

Jeanette Howard

Malvern Wells, Worcestershire

Editor's note: The god Pan, of course, has been blamed for inducing panic – the opposite of bliss – as exemplified by many first-hand accounts published in these pages.

Reptilian hijack

Re your report on the European Parliament and conspiracy theories [‘Brexit Babylon’, FT378:55]: I see that in the May 2019 European Parliamentary elections, Ivan Sincic was successful as the candidate for the Human Shield party in Croatia. He believes the Earth has been hijacked by reptilian beings and is a follower of David Icke, who also visited Croatia in the campaign.

David Bowles

Ashted, Surrey

SIMULACRA CORNER

Faces and figures in nature sent in by FT readers



TOP LEFT: Will Clark tells us he “found this ‘bumtree’ giving passers-by the full moon in the Bardia National Park, Nepal, while hunting tigers (with a camera).”

TOP RIGHT: We received this photograph at Fortean Towers last March, but have mislaid the accompanying email. If it’s yours, please let us know.

BOTTOM LEFT: Gary Tavender spotted this in Howden, East

Yorkshire. He comments: “This tree certainly has wood!”

BOTTOM RIGHT: Andrew Hardwick captured this wooden posterior in Dobursko in Bulgaria.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

LETTERS

Spiral clouds

I can offer a suggestion regarding the mysterious spiral cloud [FT379:11]. Such clouds have been suggested as earthquake precursors, caused by an intense electric field (supposedly due to imminent fault rupture) ionising super-cooled atmosphere. I would refer anyone interested to a paper by Ikeya, Sasaoka, Teramoto and Huang (1997), “Ferroelectric Alignment of Piezo-compensating Quasi-Dipolar Charges and Formation of Tornado-like Earthquake Cloud” in the journal *Ionics*. In particular, the photo taken before the 1995 Kobe earthquake reproduced as Figure 4 (b) is very similar to David Hardgrave’s photo at Sudbury Hill. The paper is conveniently available online at <http://www.eqsigns.net/PDFs/QE-12.pdf>. This is not to say that a major earthquake is about to hit Wiltshire, but rather that a similar electrical phenomenon may be at work.

Dr Roger Musson
Edinburgh

Youfoology

I read Peter Brookesmith’s Flying Saucery column in the May issue [FT379:28] and came away puzzled. I can’t imagine why he’s writing articles on a subject for which he feels such contempt. I certainly sympathise with his attitude concerning UFOs. As he demonstrates in the column, the entire subject is home to countless idiots, liars and lunatics. But when almost half of a writer’s article on UFOs is actually a plug for what sounds like an excellent book on Homer, I can’t help but wonder why he bothers to write about “a faggot of a subject, a bundle of disparate and heterogeneous twigs, all of them pretty queer.” Isn’t it time for him to move on to literary criticism or politics or something more rewarding? Again, I sympathise with his dismay and revulsion for the subject, but that’s not really what is needed for your magazine. I could find exasperated articles by people who are fed up with UFOs and



Literary panic

We’ve been reading some John Wyndham in my literature classes, and on a trip to Hampstead in north London one of

my students, Barry Watkinson, spotted these two signs, altogether too close for comfort.
Gail-Nina Anderson
Newcastle

their accompanying madness anywhere on the Internet.

Meanwhile Jenny Randles has consistently been able to come up with interesting and thought-provoking articles on the subject. Her column is one of my favourite treats. Your magazine has done an excellent job of covering other subjects that can’t possibly exist – mermaids, for example. It isn’t necessary to believe that something is real to find it interesting. The value of UFOs to fortians is their anomalous nature. Furthermore, the sideshow that comes with the subject should be interesting to anyone with a sense of curiosity. I personally think that the ETH is probably the least likely explanation, but the whole story, the mythos of UFOs is interesting and deserves to be examined. After reading his article, I can’t be-

lieve that Mr Brookesmith still feels that way.

Bryan White
Duncanville, Texas

Peter Brookesmith responds: I had innocently thought it plain that my feelings about ufology are far from contemptuous and a long way from revulsion. They more nearly approach an irrepressible – if sometimes horrified – fascination with the subject and the things people are prepared to believe, usually without good reason. The brief for the column is to present “news and views” of “fads and flaps” from ufology, which I strive to do without misrepresentation. As Mr White politely does not say, these fads and flaps are often full of crap: so they frequently collide with my pedantic insistence on correcting errors where I spy them. And I can’t

really help it if the people and things I think worth reporting – i.e. are sufficiently entertaining to grace these pages – are also slightly bats. Even when they’re plain wrong, I hope their delusions raise a chuckle among the sane. By such possibly perverse means I seek to explore “the whole story [and] the mythos of UFOs”.

Protect and Survive

I was delighted to find the latest issue revisiting hauntology-related themes [FT379:37-43]. The whole Protect And Survive thing resonated with me, as I discovered these eerie transmissions in video form after your previous articles, and subsequently sampled the sounds in one of my own hauntology tracks, ‘Chlorine Tube’ (named for my also sampling a BBC educational chemistry programme from the 1970s, whereby I converted an exploding test tube into two percussion instruments). I also sampled the Open University theme and turned that into a track; the theme absolutely fascinated me as a youngster. It’s hard to explain why, but it’s yet another example of the weird atmosphere present in the 1970s and 80s. I discovered music such as the brilliant Moon Wiring Club due to the previous cover story, which is ironic as I’ve been obsessed with Boards of Canada (perhaps hauntology music godfathers, also mentioned in the aforementioned article) for nearly 20 years.

Thanks to your coverage, I’ve discovered numerous films and old TV programmes. Last night I saw *Threads*, and today I’ve started watching *Survivors*. We’re lucky, in the YouTube age, to have access to so much of the past.

Thanks once again for your quite amazing publication. I literally feel like a child at Christmas whenever a copy arrives through the letterbox. (Should you care for a quick listen, ‘Chlorine Tube’ is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrZ5behyGCo.)

Tom Vanheems
By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

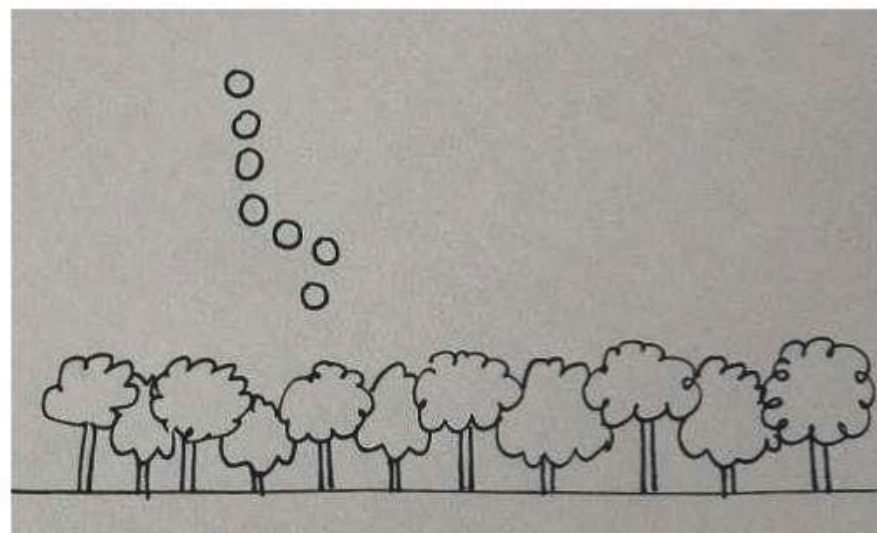
First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Mystery lights

In January-February 2017, in Glazebrook, Cheshire, my wife and I experienced some strange bright lights, which appeared in front of us on different occasions within a two-week timeframe. One night, around 2.15am, my wife saw a brilliant white light that flashed on and then off, lighting up the bathroom more brightly than bulbs in there could have done. Her initial thought had been that it was something in the garden at first floor height.

A second sighting was a week later, around 5–6pm, on the village green. There was a brilliant white flash in front of us that lit up the whole green as bright as day, but lasting for a second at most. I can best describe it as like a massive flash from a camera, but much more impressive. There was no sign of anything that could have caused the light, as the green does not have streetlights and we were using a torch to get across it that evening. We could not say where the light came from, other than that it was in front of us and less than 30ft (9m) away, no higher than 6ft (1.8m) off the ground. The weather was just average and slightly cloudy.

A third sighting of a bright light came three days later at Glazebrook station, around 6.15am one morning. There was a brilliant white flash, bright enough to light up the street as if it were a bright summer's day. It appeared above my head for a fraction of second, with no obvious source. Again, the weather was average and slightly cloudy. About 35 minutes before this event, I had seen a string of bright white lights floating in the sky above a field with a tree-lined edge, on the Moss in the direction of Culcheth (see drawing). I would liken them to the size of a streetlight when observed from around 400m (1,300ft). They did not appear to be moving, rather hanging statically. However, the string appeared to flash out when I spotted it. I later checked in daylight, and there was no sign of any lighting array, or struc-



ture, that could have accounted for it. Given the time of day, I was not aware of any other witnesses to this odd sighting.

Jim D

Warrington, Cheshire

Water poltergeist?

Something perplexing happened during my first fortnight as a PhD student at York University in October 1993. I was temporarily staying in St Lawrence Court and after a particularly hard night drinking, I awoke early the next morning to find my desk covered in water. My electric typewriter (undamaged fortunately) was in the middle of a specifically localised pool of water, and some of my blank typing paper was damaged. My TV, also on the table, was out of reach of the pool of water. I mopped up the water, which took great effort.

The pool was definitely water, it had no colour, taste or odour, and only affected the desk, not the floor, chair or wall. There was no patch on the ceiling and my door and window were locked. When I moved into Goodricke College, an identical thing happened. This second event happened in late spring/early-mid summer 1994, and again only covered the desk. My room was facing the university lake and fountain; however, my windows and door were firmly shut, and again, the fluid had no flavour, odour or colour. There was a hell of a lot of it though. My friends and I joked about a water poltergeist trying to stop me drinking so much – again, like the first, the second event was preceded

by a night of boozing. In both cases, my desk was about a metre from my bed.

The third event was much less spectacular and happened after I moved into private accommodation. I don't have an exact date for this (sometime between August 1994 and April 1997), but one morning, there was a small (one-foot radius) area of dampness on the floor at the bottom of my bed, in front of my closet. I was not drinking the night before this latest event. I am at a loss to explain these events, except I know for a fact that I *didn't* do them!

Dr Paul Lee

Walton-on-Thames, Surrey

Editor's note: For a similar phenomenon, see "Soaking Alarm" [FT117:51].

Red-Eyed Spirit

My family lived in the suburbs of Glasgow. One night when I was 10 years old, I awoke at around 3am and got up to use the loo. I was fully awake and definitely not dreaming. At that age I found getting up in the middle of the night rather creepy and really didn't like venturing out of my bedroom. On leaving the bathroom, I thought I would seek some reassurance from my parents, just to ease my fears. I just wanted them to tell me that there was nothing to be scared of, and to go back to sleep. However, when I opened the door of their dark bedroom, something caught my eye underneath the dressing table, which was positioned directly below the window

that looked straight onto where I was standing. This table had an arch on the underside for a chair to slide in.

I saw something extremely weird that I cannot explain to this day – it's even hard to try and put it into words. It was a spirit of some sort, crouched in the arch of the dressing table and it was glowing white. It had its arms wrapped around its legs. Its body was facing to the right, whilst its head was turned facing me. This 'thing' was looking directly at me and had glowing red eyes, which looked demonic; this is what captured my attention in the first place. What scared me most about it was the fact that it looked human; this might sound ridiculous, but it looked the spitting image of my mum, only really angry and malevolent.

I looked at this spirit for around 10 seconds, but it seemed like much longer. It didn't move. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I thought, what is my mum doing under there? However, I quickly realised that it wasn't her; she was lying fast asleep in bed. I felt as if the fiery red eyes were staring into my soul as the thing continued to stare at me. Coming to my senses quickly, I screamed at full volume, waking my parents, and then ran to switch on the light.

As soon as I turned on the light, whatever was there had disappeared. I was frantic and told my parents what had happened. They dismissed it as me being half asleep and still dreaming, but I know for a fact that I wasn't. I fully recall everything that I had done prior to visiting the room (walking through the living room and hall and going to the bathroom) and was awake for 5-10 minutes before the incident.

Since this happened, nobody else in the house has seen anything of the same nature. I have never seen the thing again, thankfully, as it really scared me – and does now, even thinking about it!

Laura-Anne Leddie

By email

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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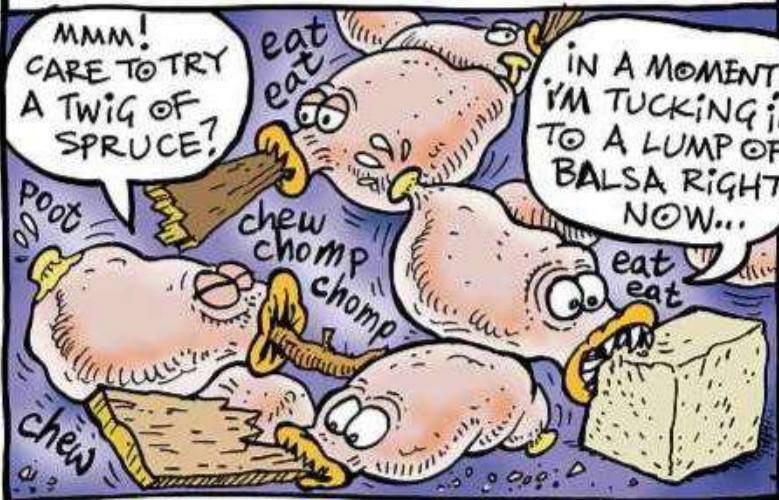
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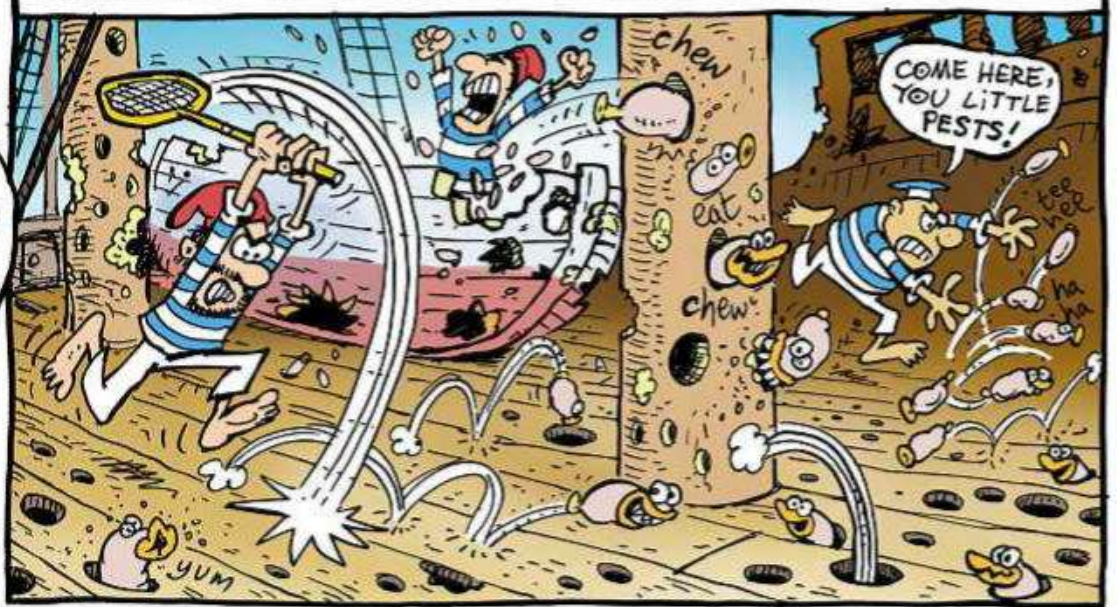
ROCKY THE SHIPWORM

HUNT EMERSON

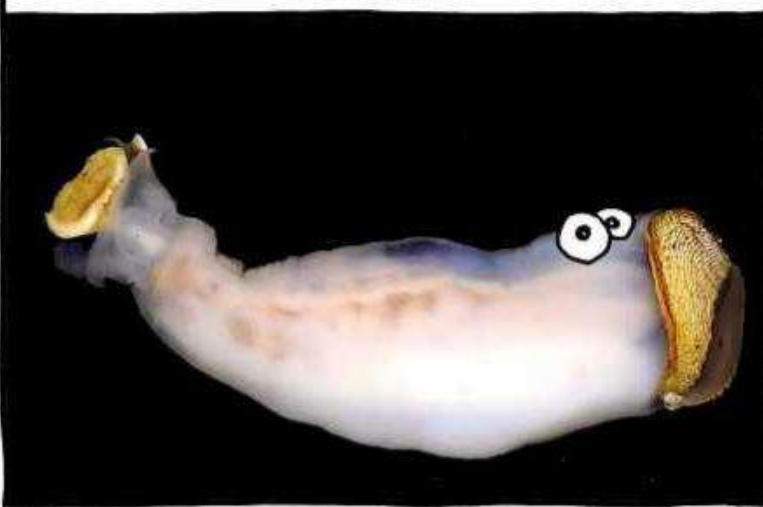
THE SHIPWORM IS A MOLLUSC THAT EATS WOOD. IT'S A VERY SPARTAN DIET, BUT THE WORM THRIVES ON IT!



INDEED, IN THE WORLD OF WOODEN SHIPS, IT IS A PEST!



RECENTLY, AN ENTIRELY NEW GENUS OF SHIPWORM HAS BEEN DISCOVERED THAT EATS ROCK!

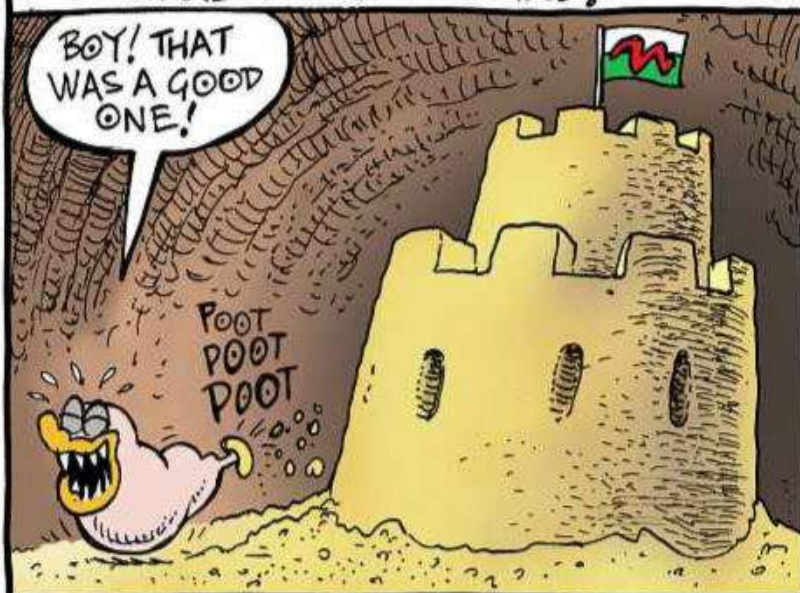


IT'S CALLED **LITHOREDO ABATANICA** (L. Abat) - "LITHOREDO" MEANING "ROCK MUNCHER", AND "ABATANICA" BECAUSE IT IS FOUND ONLY ON A 5km STRETCH OF THE RIVER ABATAN, IN THE PHILIPPINES!

L. Abat TUNNELS THROUGH LIMESTONE BY EATING IT...



...AND IT SHITS SAND!



THE ORGANS FOR DIGESTING WOOD THAT POWER THE USUAL TYPE OF SHIPWORMS ARE ENTIRELY ABSENT FROM OUR MOLLUSC, AND SCIENTISTS HAVE NO IDEA YET HOW L. Abat DOES IT, AND WHAT FOOD CAN BE GAINED FROM LIMESTONE!

CRABS, SHRIMPS, LIMPETS, SNAILS, MUSSELS, AND BRISTLEWORMS ALL LURK IN ABANDONED L. Abat TUNNELS...



...AND THE WORM'S MOVEMENT OF ROCK INTO SAND CAN CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF THE RIVER OVER TIME!

THERE IS A PARTICULARLY TRICKY DOG-LEG ON THE ABATAN THAT IS ENTIRELY DUE TO L. Abat!



THE LOCAL FILIPINOS HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THEM FOR YEARS, AND OF COURSE CONSIDER THEM A DELICACY...



COMING NEXT MONTH



HELTER SKELTER

CHARLES MANSON AND THE
OCCULT SIXTIES



HUMAN HEADLINE

THE STRANGE TABLOID
BALLADS OF RED RIVER DAVE



JACK KIRBY,
EPIC BEARDS,
NAZI MYSTICS,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 383

ON SALE 15 AUGUST 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Ivan Klyucharev, 30, a member of a group that practises survival skills in extreme situations, disappeared in May 2017 after going hiking. Two years later, his remains were discovered handcuffed and chained to a tree in a forest in Shatura, 80 miles (130km) east of Moscow. Eduard Karpov spotted his skull covered by a hoodie and the rest of his skeleton shrouded by leaves. A camera pointing at the body was nearby, along with five more cuffs, three metal chains, six padlocks, a book of knots, a tent, salt and matches. His mother had hired search teams on more than one occasion over the last two years, but they had drawn a blank. Curiously, the area of forest where he was finally found had previously been searched several times in vain. His friends described him as “impetuous” and said his favourite quote was “destiny will always lead us”. They said they could imagine him going into the forest, locking himself up, throwing away the key, and attempting to wriggle free like a latterday Houdini. Or was it murder dressed up to look like an accident? Officials were examining the camera’s memory card and his computer amid speculation that he had an interest in bondage and sado-masochistic sex. Some reports claimed that only his left hand was handcuffed to a chain attached to the tree. *Sky News*, 17 April; *Metro*, Sun, 18 April 2019.

Bethan Gaskin, 24, choked to death attempting a party trick known as the “Jaffa Cake challenge” – fitting as many Jaffa Cakes into her mouth as possible. The mother of a three-year-old girl suffered cardiac arrest at her home in Bourne, Lincolnshire, on 22 February. Her family found her on the toilet floor after congealed chocolate and jelly got stuck in her throat. She was taken to hospital, where she died five days later from a brain injury. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 23 Mar 2019.

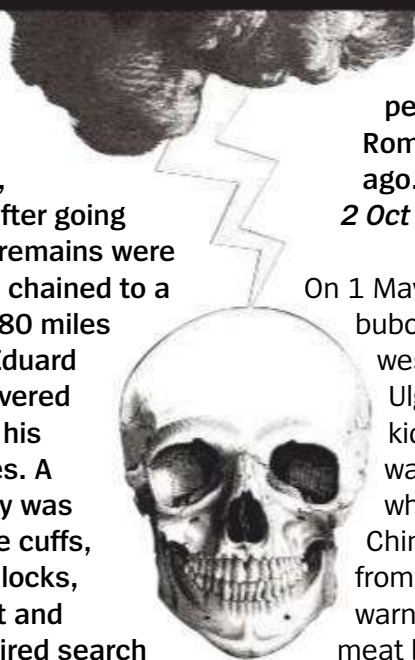
In June last year, a short-sighted man shot dead a 78-year-old neighbour after mistaking him for a marauding monkey in Kamogawa, Japan. In October, Italy’s environment minister Sergio Costa called for a nationwide ban on Sunday hunting after an 18-year-old was mistaken for a wild boar and shot dead. Nathan Labolani was walking his dog in woods near Apricale on 30 September when a hunter shot him in the abdomen with a Winchester rifle. Boar populations have risen rapidly in Italy in recent years, with an estimated one million wild pigs roaming

the countryside and on the periphery of major cities including Rome, up from 600,000 a decade ago. *D.Star*, 18 June; *D.Telegraph*, 2 Oct 2018.

On 1 May, a Kazakh couple died of bubonic plague in Mongolia’s westernmost province of Bayan-Ulgii after eating raw marmot kidney. A six-day quarantine was declared in the region, which borders Russia and China, preventing nine tourists from leaving. Authorities have warned against eating raw marmot meat because it can carry *Yersinia pestis*, the plague germ. Some people ignore the warnings as they believe that consuming the innards of the large rodent is good for their health. Each year in Mongolia at least one person dies of the plague, mostly due to consuming such meat. [AFP] *Guardian*, 6 May 2019.

Supermarket worker Danny Munro, 26, was a serial prankster. On one occasion he squirted ketchup on himself, pretending to have been stabbed, and another time he faked anaphylactic shock after eating nuts while driving. He died three days after strangling himself with his tracksuit bottoms in Bignall End, Staffordshire. His girlfriend Amy Leaman, who had previously warned him against ‘crying wolf’, initially dismissed her boyfriend’s hanging as another joke and the true horror only dawned on her when he was unresponsive to her pleas and his face turned blue. Despite dashing downstairs to grab a knife to cut him loose, she was too late. She called 999 but Mr Munro lost his fight for life at the Royal Stoke University Hospital on 4 August 2018. A post-mortem examination gave a cause of death due to massive brain swelling from compression to the neck. *dailymail.co.uk*, 2 May 2019.

A male fashion model died after collapsing on the catwalk. Brazilian Tales Soares, 26, staggered and fell face down after apparently tripping on his shoelaces, or the long straps on his sandals. The audience thought it was part of the show until paramedics rushed to treat Soares, who was foaming at the mouth. The show for clothes brand Ocksa at Brazil’s São Paulo Fashion Week carried on, with models carrying tribute placards with the word *amor* (love) and *luto* (mourning). Soares’s agency denied drugs were involved, saying his behaviour was always “exemplary” and he was a healthy vegetarian. *Sun*, *D.Mail*, 29 April 2019.



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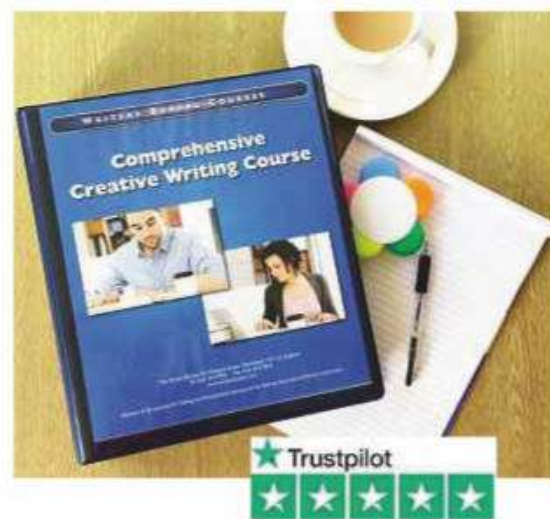
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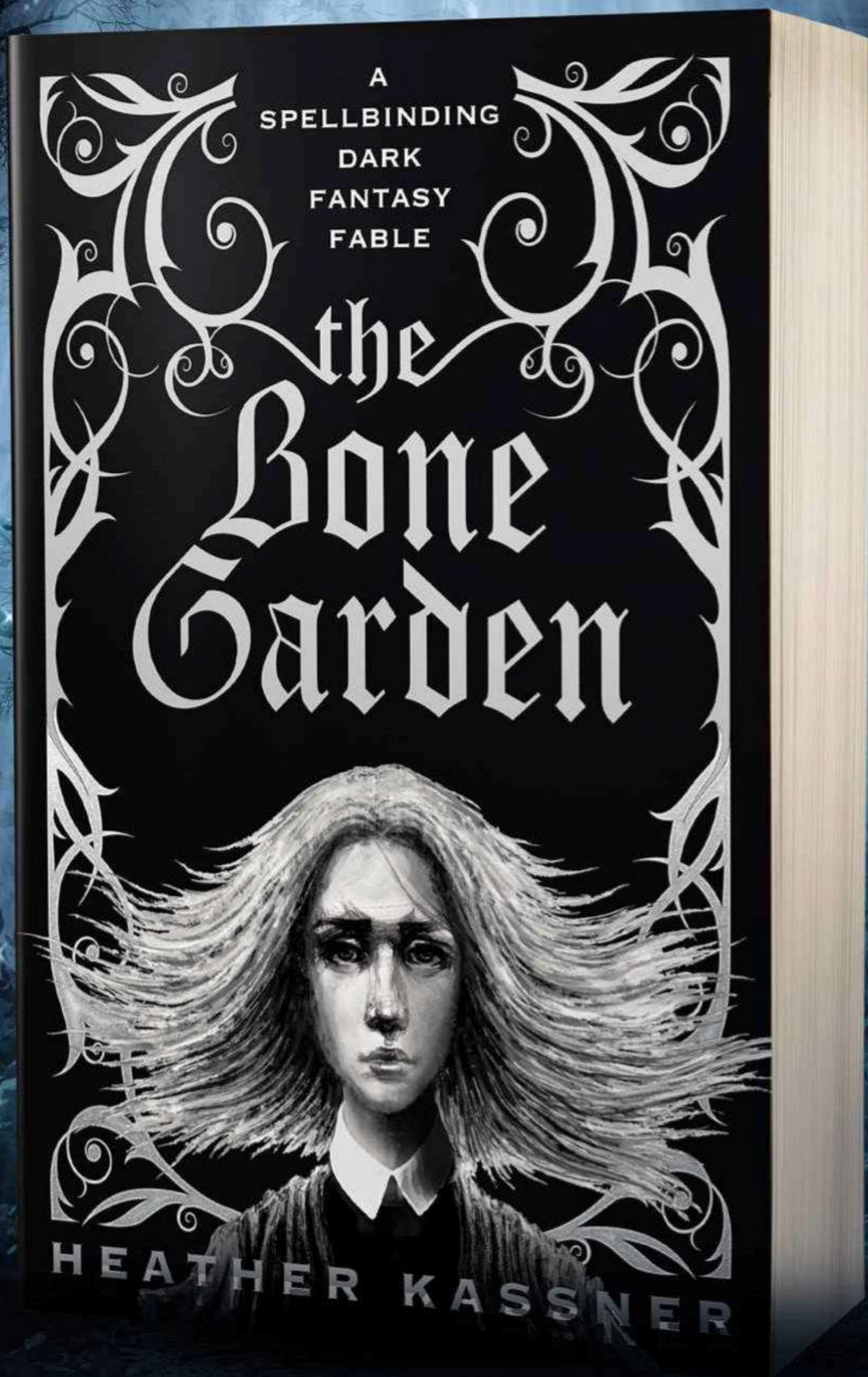
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